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MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE

JAN., 1977
VOL. 40, NO. 1

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

MURDER MAKER

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Trying to unravel the mysterious murder of a dowager client, Shayne has the ill fortune to fall afoul of his old foeman Peter Painter, Miami Beach Chief of Detectives, who blows the redhead's cover and thus sets him up as a shooting gallery duck ..... **2 to 59**

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Complete

THE NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

The redhead didn't mind Peter Painter blowing his cover at the Palm House—not at first. But when the Miami Beach Chief of Detectives' boner cost Shayne's client her life, he knew he was going to have to keep ahead of the cops till he nailed her killer.

by BRETT HALLIDAY

CAP PEREZ HAD BEEN a hack-driver for thirty of his fifty-two years. In that time he had developed a sixth sense. He knew when his passenger and trip were kosher or when both smelled like dead fish ripening in hot sunshine.

This bright Tuesday afternoon, Cap was mentally sniffing a dead fish odor. For one thing, the large redhaired man in the back seat would not normally take a cab from Miami to Miami Beach. Mike Shayne normally would drive his own powerful wheels over to the island city.

But the real tipoff was the single suitcase on the seat beside Shayne. Shayne had been a resident of Miami for as long as Cap could remember. Shayne was a private eye, a damned good one, but not a man to play footsie. Shayne was blunt. No frills or facade. Shayne might pack a .45 from Miami to Miami Beach, but not a suitcase.

Furthermore, Cap had been called to Shayne's Flagler Street office. So Cap knew he had a role in a Mike Shayne case and was secretly excited as he expertly threaded the flow of causeway traffic.

In the back seat of the taxi,

© 1977 by Brett Halliday

MURDER MAKER

Shayne sucked a last drag from a cigaret and fired the butt out an open window. They were on Collins Avenue in Miami Beach now. Collins was the main thoroughfare. The Palm House lay about a mile ahead.

Shayne caught the reflection of Cap's eyes in the rearview mirror and grinned. He knew Cap was curious. But he also knew Cap would not ask questions. It was why the detective was using the veteran cab driver.

Shayne said, "When we get the doorman at the Palm House, Cap, charge me the ticket from International Airport, not from Flagler. I want him to hear you."

"Right. I should stick around?"

"Stay loose. Lucy will be your contact."

The doorman was a tall man in a tall black hat, tails and white gloves who knew how to open a cab door and summon a bellhop. Shayne stepped into the sunshine of the balmy afternoon, his rugged face relaxed, but his gray eyes busy. It was exactly two o'clock. He was on schedule.

He paid Cap Perez as the bellhop whisked away the suitcase. Cap picked up a new fare immediately and rolled. Shayne turned to the Palm House, a majestic structure of glass and steel with fountains and miniature waterfalls out front. Inside were vastness, cool elegance and scurrying people.

He told a neatly mustached desk clerk, "J.T. Vought—New York. I have a reservation."

"Is that room or cabana, sir?"

"Upstairs."

"Jack! *Jack Vought!*"

The greeting was uttered with a ring of genuine surprise. It came from Shayne's right. A woman with a wide smile and an outstretched hand approached him. She might be sixty, he thought. She was short, heavy, had a thick neck. There was blue-rinsed hair, and the bulges and valleys of her body had been misplaced by time. But there was a coltish appeal about her.

"Mrs. Oliver!" said Shayne, echoing the woman's performance. They shook hands warmly. She continued, "What a *small* world! What brings you to Miami Beach, Jack?"

"Quick trip, Mrs. Oliver. Overnight only. Business."

She had called his Flagler Street offics the previous afternoon. She was being bilked. Normally she would have visited there, but she felt sure she was being watched and did not want to tip her hand. So she asked him to come to the Palm House, arriving at 2 p.m. Tuesday, and check in as J.T.

Vought of New York City. She would be at the desk and would greet him as an old friend. Then they would get together and she would explain in detail what she wanted.

She had offered a $5,000 package, $1,000 as a retainer, the remaining $4,000 to be paid if she got what she wanted. She also had given him Lance Featherton, a New York private eye, as a reference. She had called the New York eye, seeking a private detective in the Miami area. Featherton had told her to hire Mike Shayne.

Shayne had agreed to talk to her, then had phoned Featherton, who had been expecting the call. Featherton had given Clara Oliver an A-Okay. She was a widow and up to her double chins in greenbacks. Once her husband had been the object of an extortion plot and had hired Featherton. Her husband had been a wheel with one of the major radio-television networks.

Featherton did not know what the hell was going on in Miami Beach. All he knew was Mrs. Oliver had told him she was being had and she wanted the bilker behind bars.

"Why not the cops?" Shayne had asked.

" Cops are for those who cannot afford eyes," Featherton had said. At least, that was how Mrs. Oliver saw things.

Now Clara Oliver asked, "Do you have time for a drink, Jack?"

"Thirty minutes?"

"Fine. I'm in the cabanas—number eight."

Shayne turned from the desk. The clerk was busy, but he hadn't missed a word. The redhead found his bellhop waiting patiently at an elevator door. They whispered up to a large room that overlooked a long stretch of sand and cabanas fronting a vastness of water.

Shayne freshened up, leaving a damp washcloth and towel. He butted a second cigaret in a tray and headed for the door. Everything looked normal—the exposed suitcase left open—should someone want to look over the room during his absence.

The row of cabanas was a narrow strip of palm-shaded oasis against the loose sand beach and gently lapping water. A constant breeze blowing in from the water dulled the sting of sunshine against bathers and sand loungers. Clara Oliver sat cross-ankled in a well-shaded chaise longue just outside the front door of cabana number eight. Shayne sat in a webbed chair near the crossed ankles.

"Your drink?" she smiled. "I

do not keep anything in the cabana." She lifted an arm, flipped her wrist.

The youth had been hovering down the beach. He came to them immediately, his movements easy, his smile open, whis white teeth flashing. He was constructed like a Fijian warrior, sun darkened, with smooth muscles, long black hair.

"Beer, Sam," said Mrs. Oliver.

Shayne ordered a cognac and ice-water chaser.

Mrs. Oliver followed the boy with her eyes. "His name is Sam Goldtree," she said. "He is a beachboy. I wanted you to see him. I'm afraid he has a role in what I am about to tell you."

"Afraid?"

She frowned. "I like Sam."

II

"I HAD A SISTER," said Clara Oliver. "Marie. She was married to Jim Henderson, a New York attorney, a man considered by many to be an expert in corporate affairs. Three years ago, Jim was killed in the crash of a private plane and Marie was left alone. She and Jim were childless.

"Marie and I were a year apart in age and close friends in addition to being sisters. But no one could replace Jim. Marie became quite depressed, then discovered she was suffering from a non-operable malignancy. Frankly, Mr. Shayne, I worried about suicide for a spell, but looking back now, I don't think Marie had the fortitude to take her life.

"Anyway, she came down here about a year ago. Miami Beach and the Palm House had been a second home to Jim and Marie for twenty years and I was relieved when she decided to make the move. I had been afraid Marie was going to hole up in her New York apartment and die. I saw the trip, the winter residency here, as a healthy sign. Then, of course, she died.

"The death shocked me, naturally. And I immediately thought of suicide. However, it turned out to be a perfectly natural death. A heart attack, suffered in her sleep one night in her cabana here at Palm House.

"Everything else seemed in order, too. Marie had divided her estate between an arts group she had founded and a university she had befriended for years. I was named executrix of her will, but that was mere formality, since one of Jim's friends took care of the paper work. However, I did go over all of the papers with the attorney and that was when I

discovered a large and entirely unaccountable cash expenditure.

"Marie had four bank accounts, a savings and a checking in New York and a savings and checking here. Three of the accounts were in order. The savings here struck me as being far too low. It showed a balance of ten thousand dollars in round figures. I asked the attorney to investigate. He did and found there had been cash withdrawals from the account totaling one-hundred-forty thousand dollars in a four-month period. We went over the other three accounts again. There was no record of transfer of money to any of them from the savings here.

"Naturally, I became damned curious about where one-hundred forty-thousand dollars in cash might have been spent by my sister, especially since there was nothing tangible to show for it. I even had the wild idea she might have become hooked on gambling and been a big loser. Her attorney came down here, upon my insistence, investigated, but found absolutely no evidence to support my theory. Then I recalled something.

"Marie and I kept contact by telephone when she was wintering here. We conversed two, sometimes three, nights a week. It was during a couple of these conversations . . . "

Clara Oliver let the words dribble off. She sat forward as Sam, the beachboy, approached.

Shayne made himself looked relaxed. But he was measuring the youth minutely from under shaggy brows. He pegged Sam Goldtree as a good-looking breezy boy who fancied himself a hustler—especially among mature women.

The youth seemed to pay little attention to the redhaired detective as he served Clara Oliver's beer with a flourish. He put Shayne's cognac and ice water on a table politely and faded fast. But he remained in sight down the oasis, prepared to be summoned again.

He could also keep an eye on Mrs. Oliver and guest, Shayne surmised.

Clara Oliver sipped beer. "It was during these telephone conversations, Mr. Shayne, that I learned my sister had come under the influence of a faith healer named Maxwell Poland. She had discovered Maxwell Poland through a beachboy at Palm House, a boy named Sam Goldtree.

"I poo-pooed Maxwell Poland to Marie, but she remained insistent that he was helping her, physically and spiritually. But I finally got to the point I didn't want to hear any more about

Mr. Poland and whenever Marie began to talk about him, I'd turn the conversation in another direction.

"After she died so suddenly I forgot about Mr. Poland until I began the investigation of Marie's bank accounts. I could not find a record of one dime spent for Mr. Poland—and I assumed that healers of any nature demand some kind of remuneration.

"Did it mean Marie had been paying Mr. Poland in cash? And had she given him one-hundred-forty thousand dollars in four months?

"It was so astronomical I couldn't believe it. But I had to believe one-hundred-forty thousand dollars had disappeared somewhere. And then I became a little gutsy. I came down here myself, set up in Palm House, let it be known I was alone in the world, not a millionaire, but I wasn't going to worry about a thousand dollars here or there—primarily because I was incurably ill, which, incidently, I'm not.

"It worked, Mr. Shayne. One afternoon young Sam brought my beer and turned on a little extra charm. I invited him to sit with me. We conversed idly for a while and then I told him about my physical problem. He suggested Maxwell Poland.

"Maxwell Poland is a man of many faces—a self-styled religious leader, the head of a cult called the Brotherhood of the Yellow Bird, a Buddhist, a Presbyterian—and a faith healer. He also just happens to sell a supposed cure for cancer, an exotic and illegal drug concoction supposedly put together by Indians somewhere deep in the Andes and smuggled into the United States.

"Well, I have been going to Maxwell Poland for six weeks now, and I have spent fifteen-thousand dollars. That's in cash, Mr. Shayne. Maxwell Poland does not take checks or charge cards. It's been expensive, I know I've been had, but the big lure surfaced just last Friday.

"I have an incurable disease, but Mr. Poland has access to a curable drug. The only problem is that the drug must be smuggled into the country and smuggling is expensive. Mr. Poland will need fifty thousand in cash if I am interested in obtaining the drug. I called you."

Shayne used a thumb and forefinger to tug at his ear. "Got anything tangible to show for the fifteen gees?"

"A little card that I carry in my wallet. It says I am a member of the Brotherhood of the Yellow Bird. It cost five-thousand dollars. Then there have been some *gifts* since I en-

rolled. All tax deductible, of course—although I won't really know that until my next IRS audit.

"Incidently, Mr. Poland does not live in what could be called a housing project. It is a thirty-acre estate, splendiferous. Several people live there, his *disciples,* I understand. And the yellow robes are furnished. It's a priestly garb, full robe and hood. When you enter the front door, you are provided.

"If you live there, it is the only article of clothing you wear. And *anyone* can live there. It is a mere matter of turning over all of your assets to take up residency."

"Fifteen thou, frustration and sarcasm, Mrs. Oliver, are going to get you what?" Shayne asked, staring her straight in the eye.

She returned the stare without wavering. "Maxwell Poland behind bars," she said. "My sister was bilked out of one-hundred-forty thousand dollars. I am currently being bilked."

"Probably," agreed the detective, "but it's your word against Poland's, right?"

A crafty smile appeared suddenly on her face. "As they say in some circles, Mr. Shayne, I may have a leg up. I have tapes of my conversations with Maxwell Poland.

"My late husband once had a

business venture go sour on him when he could not prove certain verbal promises had been made," said Clara Oliver. "He became a believer in tape recording, especially when money was involved. I learned from him. Taping is a precaution.

"I came to Miami Beach and the Palm House prepared. My daily wear has included a small recorder on my body. I now possess tapes of conversations with Maxwell Poland, Sam Goldtree, members of the Brotherhood of the Yellow Bird I have met at Maxwell Poland's house."

"So?" said Shayne.

"I want you to listen to my tapes, Mr. Shayne, tell me whether or not I have enough incriminating evidence to put Maxwell Poland in jail."

"Your attorney friend could

do that and I doubt it would cost you five thousand smacks. So I assume you don't really have that much on the tapes. What you really want is for me to put the hook on Poland for keeps."

She gave him a slitted look. Her smile was tight. She said softly, "Lance Featherton knew of what he spoke. I already like you, Mr. Shayne. You think straight and you talk straight. But my tapes can be a starting point for you, can't they?"

"Maybe," said the redhead, "*if* I decide to take the case. And I'll know *that* after I listen." He looked Clara Oliver straight in the eyes again. "Maxwell Poland may be a phony, but I don't railroad. I'll take him on for you if it sounds like a crime has been committed or criminal intent is involved. If it's a simple case of hoodwinking, no dice."

She sat frowning for several seconds. Then she abruptly laughed gaily and left the chaise longue in a flurry of movement. She came to the detective, stood at his shoulder. Out of a corner of his eye, he saw her hand disappear into a large pocket of her dress. She bent over him and planted a moist kiss on his cheek, her hand sliding across his shoulders and dropping down inside his coat front. It dipped briefly into the inside pocket of his jacket.

She stood straight, her hand remaining on the nape of his neck. "My, that's a large gun you are wearing!" she breathed.

"A forty-five."

She again laughed gaily. "I just deposited a thousand-dollar check."

"I know. It'll get you a listen."

"Is Sam watching us?"

Shayne leaned forward, butted his cigaret in a tray on the table. Down the oasis, the beachboy continued to lounge against the base of a palm. He was not having a busy afternoon.

"He caught it."

"Not the transaction, I hope. I didn't want him to see that."

"Are you afraid of him, Mrs. Oliver?"

"No, not of Sam. But Maxwell Poland . . . " She hesitated, then quivered. "I don't know, Mr. Shayne, but there is something about the man. I just have the feeling he could be dangerous."

"You said on the phone you are being watched."

She asked for a cigaret. He flipped one up from a pack, held a match flame for her. "I normally don't smoke," she said. "Only when I become extremely nervous."

"Then isn't a cigaret now a

giveaway that we are not just old friends from New York?" said Shayne.

She butted the cigaret quickly, then looked at Shayne around her shoulder. "I'm blowing this all over the place."

"Let's hear your tapes," he said, standing.

"Not here," she said. She faced him, forced another gay laugh. "Did that do any good?"

He shrugged. "Depends on just how sharp Sam is. Standing here, that laugh of yours is just about as genuine as a mirage. Okay, how do we go through this next little transaction?"

"For one thousand dollars, Mr. Shayne," she said, drawing herself up, "I think that is your move. I'm *that* much of a businesswoman."

"I'll meet you at the lobby desk at six," he said. "We'll go out for dinner. Nothing fancy. Pantsuit will be okay. Bring the tapes in your purse—and include the one of our conversation this afternoon."

Her laughter was gentle and genuine this time. "Oh, my," she said, "Lance Featherton certainly did point me to the right man!"

III

SHAYNE TELEPHONED Lucy Hamilton from a pay phone in the lobby. "Have Cap over here at six p.m., angel," he said, "and tell him to park on the street. We'll be leaving a package in his back seat. He's to bring it to you after we leave his cab. It will contain tapes. Bring them to the office in the morning."

Mrs. Oliver wore a gold suit and carried a large gold purse when she entered the Palm House lobby at exactly six o'clock.

Shayne left a deep chair. He made his moves casual but he was watching for Sam Goldtree. He swept the lobby again with his eyes as he turned Clara Oliver toward the street door, but there were only the scurrying public and bluesuited bellboys.

The detective curved to a cigar counter, purchased a package of cigarets. A form moved in down the counter. He glanced obliquely. The young man wore blue, was a bellhop, not a beachboy.

"Shayne!" The call was imperative and crisp.

The detective managed to mask surprise as he turned from the glass counter. A small man, foppishly dressed in an expensive Italian silk suit, was approaching quickly from the street door. He was smallboned, had a threadlike black moustache. His mouth

was set, his dark eyes were alive with suspicion.

"Petey." Shayne nodded curtly.

Peter Painter, Miami Beach chief of detectives, did not offer a hand. Rather, he began to sway on the balls of his feet as he asked, "What are you doing here, Shayne?"

"Going out to dinner. You?"

Painter swelled, seemed on the brink of explosion, then settled slightly. "I have a speaking engagement," he said, his suspicious eyes flicking to Clara Oliver.

Shayne introduced her. "She's down from New York—wintering. Well, don't want to keep you from the podium, Petey. See you 'round."

He tucked Clara Oliver's elbow in a large hand and piloted her around Peter Painter toward the door. He could feel Painter's suspicious eyes boring into his back.

"Wheee!" Clara Oliver breathed. "I got a distinct impression, Mr. Shayne, that you and Mr. Painter are not exactly bedmates."

"Miami Beach is Painterland," he replied.

"Is he a good detective?"

"Oh, yeah," Shayne admitted.

"Odd," she mused. "I have the feeling he says the same thing about you."

Outside, the redhead turned her away from the expectant doorman, who already was waving a cab forward, and piloted her along a wide sidewalk that curved out to Collins Avenue. She voiced mild surprise. "We're walking?"

He spotted Cap Perez sitting in an empty cab at the curbing. "In about twenty seconds, we're going to have a change of mind."

"My, you *are* interesting!"

"A friend of mine is driving us," he said flatly. "When we arrive at the supper club, leave the tapes on the floor of his cab. He will deliver them for me. You said you are being watched. We're going to find out."

She was immediately contrite. "Sorry. This isn't a child's game we're playing, is it?"

He put her into the back seat of the cab, said, "The Flipper, Cap—and keep a sharp eye."

"Right on, Mike."

Three blocks and two turns later, Cap added, "We've got us a live one, Mike. And it's amateur night. If he rides much closer, he's going to be in the back seat with you."

"Loner?"

"Yep. White-to-cream Pinto wagon. Couple of years old. Needs a wash and polish job. Got a few rust marks, and there's a dent in the hood. Driver's a kid—long hair,

dark. An Anglo, okay, but blue neon lights ain't his bag. He's a sunshine boy."

"I think I've got him made, Cap," said the detective. "I'll try to catch him when we get out. He could hang with us or he might go with you so watch for him. Don't take him to Lucy."

"If he goes with me, Mike, I hope he's got on swim trunks—I'll lead him straight into Biscayne Bay!"

When they got out of the cab at the supper club, the packaged tapes were on the floor and the Pinto wagon had pulled into a line of parked cars at the curbing a half block behind them. Shayne escorted Clara Oliver into The Flipper, abruptly left her with a hostess and stepped back out to the sidewalk. But the Pinto had already passed the club, was moving out.

Cap Perez still sat in his cab at the curbing. He seemed to be busy with a clipboard that was braced against the wheel. He gave Shayne a wide grin and an A-Okay designed with thumb and forefinger and then the cab eased away. Shayne knew that when he was briefed by Cap he would get a good description of the Pinto driver.

The Flipper offered excellent drink and food, and the atmosphere and service were adequate. But Shayne was taut.

"You'd rather be somewhere listening to my tapes," a wise Clara Oliver observed.

"Yeah," admitted the detective. "But we were followed here, and if *you're* being watched, *I'm* being watched. So we play tonight to the hilt. I'll check out in the morning. After that, it will be a new ball game."

She nodded, but remained silent. She was relaxed and seemed a bit heavy-eyed when Shayne escorted her to the door of cabaña eight at the Palm House much later. She turned in the doorway and clasped both of his hands. "You are sure you have to be leaving in the morning, Jack?" she asked.

"Yes. Sorry."

"I *have* enjoyed the evening!"

The palms rustled in the night wind as Shayne walked toward the brilliant lights of the main hotel structure. There were deep shadows to his right and left, and anyone could be lurking in them.

He crossed the lobby and used a pay phone. Lucy Hamilton had the tapes. She would take them to the Flagler Street office in the morning. Cap Perez also had played detective, as expected. He had tailed a Pinto station wagon to a Cortez Street address.

It was an apartment

complex—he had found the Pinto outside Apartment 10D. When his cab cruised past, lamplight and shadows had been plastered against the drapes. A long-haired young man was on the telephone, profiled against the drapes. Opposite him was a girl, equally long-haired—and naked.

"She is a well-stacked young mouse, Michael," Lucy Hamilton said. "Those are Cap's words, not mine."

Shayne said, "See you in the morning, Lucy." Then he put the phone together and used the book to get a number for the Cortez Apartments. When a female voice answered, he said, "I'm sorry. I thought this would be a switchboard."

"Residents provide their own phone service, sir."

What else, unless it was fancy, Shayne thought. He continued, "I'm looking for a Mr. Sam Goldtree."

"Mr. Goldtree is in. But you will have to find his number in the book and dial directly. That is, *if* Mr. Goldtree has telephone service."

Shayne didn't bother to look in the book again. He already had what he wanted. He stopped at the desk and left a call for 6 a.m. "And a cab at seven."

"The doorman can accomodate you at any time, sir."

J.T. Vought of New York City already had gone to bed. He would rise as Michael Shayne, Miami private detective, sniffing hungrily at a new case. It was a good feeling.

IV

TRAFFIC WAS HEAVY. Leaden skies hung. The black cab driver said, "That hurricane popping up off the coast sure was a surprise, huh?"

"We've got one brewing?" said Shayne.

"Yeah. Came alive last night. Surprised the weather boys. And it ain't that far out. If it heads north, we'll be okay, but if it comes west, watch out for your hat."

"Have we got a tail?"

Shayne saw the driver's hands work against the steering wheel. The black was silent for a few seconds before he said, "I don't think so, man, but I ain't been looking."

"I don't want one."

"Okay."

A few blocks later, the driver said, "No tail."

"Then take me to Second Avenue and Twelth Street."

When they arrived at the apartment hotel on the north bank of the Miami River, the redhead slid a bill across the back of the front seat to the driver. "Keep the change,

friend. This is where I leave you."

The driver glanced at the size of the bill and grinned all over the front seat. "Right *on!*"

Shayne deposited the suitcase in the living room of his apartment and immediately took the elevator to the basement garage, where the powerful motor of the Buick came instantly alive under his touch. He rolled to his office on Flagler Street, there found Lucy Hamilton waiting expectantly. Lucy also had a prospective client, a young man with a thin face and nervous hands. The young man looked familiar to the detective.

Lucy followed Shayne into his private office and closed the door. "He says his name is Henry Carter, Michael, and he insists on talking to you. He was waiting when I opened this morning. He says his wife has disappeared. He wants you to find her. I attempted to tell him, nicely that you normally do not handle domestic—"

Shayne waved her down. He was frowning. "I'll handle him angel. Send him to the police. But where have I seen that kid before?"

Lucy showed mild surprise. "I didn't know you recognized him."

"I don't," said the detective, "and that's the problem."

"Perhaps he works in the area," suggested the secretary.

"Yeah, maybe." Shayne waved the minor irritation off and dropped into the chair behind the large desk. "Okay, send him in. After he leaves, bring the tapes and player in here."

He began to go through the small stack of mail on his desk as Lucy opened the door and stepped into the outer office. When she returned to the

doorway, she looked puzzled. "He's gone, Michael."

"Good," said the detective. "Get the tapes."

"They're in the safe."

She left the doorway. He sat back in his chair. A thumb and forefinger worked at an ear. Where the hell had he seen Henry Carter before? Somewhere far back in his skull, little warning bells had been triggered.

Lucy appeared with the tapes and rolled in a player. "No interruptions?" she said.

"Not even a phone call."

The tapes were of good quality, but the only thing Shayne got for sure from them was that Clara Oliver was using an excellent recorder. She probably was being bilked by Maxwell Poland. The detective conceded that much, too. On the other hand, there wasn't anything really damaging to Poland on the tapes. There might be grounds for conspiracy and/or grand theft, but it would be touch and go in a courtroom. Most lawyers would need more to make charges stick.

Shayne sat deep in the chair. The Maxwell Polands of the world bothered him. They were irritants.

Poland was a con man. And con men can be criminals. Not hardrock criminals, but like Poland, criminals in their own slick way. And criminals were the redheaded detective's business.

Most of the men in the bunco division of the Miami Police Department were experts in their work. They knew all the tricks. But even among this crafty clan there was a man without peer. Collie Green had been working bunco in Miami as long as Shayne could remember.

"Mike Shayne, Collie," the redhead said into the phone.

"Hey, hey, Mike. Will Gentry just called us from Rio. Some smart grifter down there lifted him right of his socks and it was two days before he knew he had been had. Now he wants troops."

Shayne smiled briefly at the wall across his office. Will Gentry, chief of Miami police and a friend of long standing, was vacationing in South America. When Shayne needed police help, he usually went to Gentry. Now he needed Collie Green.

"What kind of sheet do you have on a Maxwell Poland, Collie?"

"Max Poland? Hey, you're taking on a heavy, Mike. But sheet? Practically zilch. We might have three, four papers on him someplace around here. Minor complaints. But that's it. He's sharp—probably about the

sharpest coneroo in town right now. How come you want to know?"

"If *I* happen to get him, *you* get him."

"Okay, Mike. I'll ride with that. So I'll read from the veins on the back of my right hand. That's how well I know the guy."

"I've got a vague general picture of him," said Shayne. "Faith healing, religion, cult, isn't worrying about where his next meal is coming from."

"Yeah, that's vague, but it covers. He's a two-pronged hipster, Mike. Kids and the very wealthy. Nothing in between. The kids are his disciples—if you'll excuse the term. The very wealthy make up his take, of course. They, too, can become disciples, but it's slightly costly. Like you put on a yellow robe out at Poland's estate, you've just peddled all your worldly goods, you know?"

"Yeah."

"The kids he feeds, provides a roof. At our last count, he had four males, two females. We figure he gets them off the streets. We've checked out a few, looking for runaways, wanteds. Figured if we turned up one, we might be able to put a small clamp on Poland himself. But we've never pulled the brass ring. All the kids we've checked have been clean."

"So when you get down to the nut?" asked Shayne.

Collie Green's sigh from the other end of the line was audible. "Max Poland lives high with no visible means of income other than donations to his cult. He offers comfort—physical, mental, emotional—if you want to pay through the nose for it. Not medicinal dispensing comfort, Mike. Poland isn't *that* stupid. Goddamnit, Shayne, he's a fast, slick talker and that's all!"

"He bilks?"

"He's the biggest milk artist we've got in this town, but prove it!"

"You ever try to work someone inside at his place?"

"Couple of times. We set up two of our gals in hotels, places we know Poland looks for potentials, but neither drew a nibble. We finally figured it was because they weren't established. I tell you, Mike, this guy is cute.

"He only goes after people who have been coming down here for years, people of obvious wealth or else they wouldn't be coming here year after year, staying for months in the swank bedrooms. To our knowledge, Poland has yet to convert a native."

"Okay, another vein—what have you heard about Poland's access to some South American

drug that may be a cancer cure?"

"Oh, *mother!*"

Shayne said, "So you answered my question already. Be talking to you again real soon, Collie."

"*Shayne!* If you hang up on me now, I'll personally put a trick on you that'll have your license inside of six weeks. I'll even be crude about it. You'll know I'm doing it, but you won't be able to do one damned thing to stop me!"

"I don't have that much, Collie."

"Something made you ask, Shayne—something you know, something you've heard, something you suspicion. That's enough for us to go to work on. It's a handle to yank. Two questions. Is Poland dispensing a drug? And, if he is, where is he getting it from? Cancer curing, you said? And from South America? Are you telling me the guy is involved in a smuggling operation or has access to a smuggled drug?"

"A woman may have been sold that bill of goods," Shayne said. "Whether or not she ever got a drug, whether or not such an operation actually exists, I don't know. It's just a wispy thread dangling out there, Collie."

"Hey, redhead, you're beautiful!"

"But I can't give you the woman, Collie. She's dead."

"Oh, *damn!*"

"She died last year. Heart attack. My client is her sister. There's one-hundred-forty gees missing from the woman's estate. The sister is interested in finding out where the cash went. She currently has me believing it went into Maxwell Poland's pocket.

"The woman who died had cancer and may have been getting supposed drug relief through Poland, one-hundred forty gees worth. The drug was costly because it had to be smuggled into the country."

"Brother Shayne, where do I find your client?"

"I'll work with her for a few days, Collie. You start sniffing with the Customs people, maybe the border boys in Texas, Arizona, the FAA. That's where *you* have clout. *Mine's* with my client. I'm getting paid to turn up stones for her."

There was silence on the line for a few seconds, then Collie Green said, "Okay, Mike, I buy. For two days. You turn up your stones, then you and I meet here Friday at four o'clock. And we put 'em on the table—all of 'em. Agreed?"

"By Friday at four, I'll have so many I won't be able to carry the sack, Collie."

He put the phone together and dialed the Palm House. He asked for Mrs. Oliver in cabana eight. He got several rings, no answer. He frowned, finally got the hotel switchboard operator back on the line.

"Mrs. Oliver doesn't seem to be in, sir." the operator said perfunctorily. "Perhaps she is on the beach. If you care to leave a number, I'll try again in thirty minutes."

Shayne left the number, but two hours passed and Clara Oliver had not returned the call. He became edgy. She should have been waiting. When he had left her the previous evening she couldn't have been sure he was going to take her case. His move hinged on what he heard from the tapes.

He dialed the Palm House again. "I'm sorry, sir, Mrs. Oliver does not seem to be in. Perhaps she is on the beach. If you'd care to—"

Shayne cut off the words by clanking the phone together. It would be three o'clock in the afternoon by the time he arrived at the hotel. He told Lucy Hamilton to button up the office early and then rolled in the Buick.

Dark menacing clouds hung low over the city. The hurricane was slowly moving northward, but it was a massive storm and its outer edge had shut off the normal Miami sunshine. It was not a day to be on a beach. In addition, Clara Oliver did not sunbathe.

V

The Palm House was bright with artificial lighting that dark Wednesday afternoon and people were running against the gale force wind that already was stretching the tops of the palm trees inland on a horizontal plane. The rain was yet to arrive but it was out there at sea. Close. It was a thick gray bank, hanging like a stage drop curtain.

Shayne braked the Buick and moved on long strides toward the hotel, his head tucked in, one hand holding his hat brim. The activity inside the lobby of the Palm House surprised him. People and bellhops, loaded with suitcases and clothing, scurried everywhere. The scene had all the earmarks of a disorganized refugee camp for the well-to-do.

The detective made his way to the main desk and finally got the attention of a clerk who looked as if he'd trade his place in heaven for tranquility and a mild highball. "What's going on?" snapped Shayne.

The clerk's frown was a pyramid of inverted crowsfeet stacking up from the bridge of

his long nose. "We are moving the cabana guests to inside accomodations, sir. They say the storm is moving northward, but we at the Palm House—"

"Have you moved Mrs. Oliver yet?" Shayne cut in. "Cabana eight."

The clerk's frown deepened. He turned to mail slots, plucked a white card from a slot marked Eight. "Mrs. Oliver is, or will be, in room two-thousand thirty, sir."

"Ring her."

"The house phones are across the lobby, sir."

Shayne looked. All the phone booths were occupied. "Ring her," he repeated.

The clerk sighed and picked up a nearby phone. He knew how to bend to an authoritative tone. Finally he put the phone together. "I'm sorry, sir. I do not get an answer in Room Two thousand thirty or cabana eight. Perhaps Mrs. Oliver is en route. As you can see, there is a bit of confusion."

Shayne went out into the wind again. He went down the short, gently sloping sidewalk to the oasis and turned along its length, moving swiftly and nimbly against the flow of guests who struggled with possessions as they hustled toward the main structure.

At cabana eight, he banged a fist on the door. He turned and shot a look over his shoulder. The rain curtain was moving swiftly across the water toward land. He banged on the door again and tried the knob. The knob did not wiggle. Then the detective spotted Sam Goldtree joggin along the oasis sidewalk toward him.

The youth pulled up short. *"Mr. Shayne!"* he said in undisguised surprise. He came forward. "Isn't Mrs. Oliver here? She's supposed to be moving inside. I came to help her."

"You seen her today, Sam?"

"No, but I just came on at two and Mr. Driscoll—he's the assistant manager—had me hustling around inside. This is the first chance I've had to—"

"You got a key to this door?"

"Hell, no, man! How could I have a key?"

"Somebody smart enough to spot Jack Vought as a phony and come up with a Mike Shayne might have an extra key or two here and there too."

"Hey, man! He shuffled nervously. Then he said, "Look, Mr. Shayne, I didn't have nothing to do with checking you out. All I did was report you as a new guest who seemed to know Mrs. Oliver. It meant extra bread to me, and I'm hungry, man. I've gotta get bread where it is, you know?"

"I will before the afternoon

is out, Sam, because you and I are going to have a long talk. But at the moment I'm interested in the whereabouts of our mutual friend. She should be on tap and she isn't.

"I don't—understand." The youth seemed totally confused as the first drops of rain began to fall.

"All we're going to get here is wet," replied the detective. He stepped back, lifted a leg and drove his foot forward. The door jamb splintered and a crack formed along its edge. Shayne kicked again and the door swung open. He moved inside and stopped. Sam Goldtree moved up beside him. Neither said anything for a few tense seconds.

Then the youth breathed, "Lord! Is she—is she dead?"

"She looks dead, Sam."

"I've never . . .seen a dead person, Mr. Shayne. I think I'm going to be sick!"

Sam Goldtree turned to a corner of the room, braced palms against the walls and retched hackingly.

Clara Oliver lay belly down on the green shag carpeting of the living room. Her weight was spread wide, right leg drawn up high. Pants were taut across buttocks and thick thighs. She was faced to the right, ear down. Elbows were wide, the forearms at 45-degree angles, fingers still clutching the nap of the carpeting.

Her eyes were open and her exposed tongue was caught in her teeth. The teeth had drawn blood. A man's cheap red-and-black necktie was embedded slightly in the flesh folds of her neck and drawn tightly in a single wrap just under the base of her skull.

Shayne took in the room from a kneeling position beside the body. It was tidy. No indication of struggle. The lone defilement came from Sam Goldtree, who remained braced in the corner and shuddered spasmodically.

The detective put the back of his hand against Clara Oliver's neck. She wasn't ice cold.

"W-What are you doing?"

Shayne looked over his shoulder. The youth stood hunched in the corner, his eyes round and hollow, his sun-browned skin ashen.

"She was alive two—three hours ago, Sam. An autopsy report will tell us whether or not she had lunch."

Sam sucked a breath, held it, then exploded, "I gotta get some air!" He darted for the door. Shayne hooked him with an arm, slammed him against a wall, planted a palm against his heaving chest.

"You kill her?"

Sam Goldtree stiffened. Abruptly he wilted against Shayne's restraining hand and babbled, "Man, man, I couldn't kill nobody! I ain't . . .I ain't got the guts!" He wagged his head. "Especially I couldn't do that to Mrs. Oliver. Man, she was good to me."

"Big tipper, you mean."

His head came up slightly. "She laid some bread on me, sure. But it was more. It was—aw, hell, how would you know?"

"You've got a few more seconds in my court, Sam."

Sam's head came up and his eyes began to glisten defiance. He caught Shayne's wrist, removed the palm from his chest. He pushed away from the wall, stared hard at the detective.

"Shayne, she was a good woman to me. She put out some bread, yeah. But we talked, too. She was like . . .like a mother, I guess. Hell, I dunno. I never had a mother. All I know is me'n her were on the same wave length. We were in tune."

"So you had no reason to kill her or set her up?"

Sam Goldtree flapped his arms. "You're wild, man! What do you mean, set her up?"

"With Maxwell Poland."

"Maxwell?" Sam Goldtree looked amazed, shook his head again. "Hey, look, Shayne, that's an entirely different bag. Maxwell is an okay man. He helps people! People got a problem, Maxwell talks to them. Me, for instance. I'm a no-cat, sniffing out food in alley trash cans, hustling a crumb here, hustling a crumb there. Rack a few pool balls, park a wheel, make a short run down the street with a little Mary J. I'm nothing, man.

"Then Maxwell comes in out of space and I'm set up here at the Palm House. I'm doing okay. I ain't going out to dinner with the Kennedys next year, but I got a loaf of bread on the table every week from the Palm House. More important, I've got a table, and a roof over it and a bedroom behind it. I also got a girl I like in that bedroom. Maxwell gave all that to me! He got me the job here.

"In return for what, Sam?"

"Look, his thing is heavy, man. I don't understand it all. I never will. I'm not interested. All he asks me to do is mention him to people who stay here at the Palm House and who might be interested."

"In return for what, Sam?" Shayne repeated.

The youth shuffled. "Okay . . .I get a C note from him every month. Cash."

"Mrs. Oliver?"

The youth lowered his eyes. "Yeah, but . . ." He didn't finish.

"But?" Shayne prodded him.

The youth shuffled again, then looked the detective straight in the eyes. "Okay, I put her on Maxwell. Whe she settled in here a few weeks ago, I didn't know her and she was making noises like she was interested in Maxwell's type of thing. She's been going out to see him, but . . .well, in the last couple of weeks me'n Mrs. Oliver, we've had a few raps.

"Just between her'n me, I ain't all that convinced Maxwell is strictly straight. Yeah, he's been good to me, and I don't mean to be badmouthing him, but just the other day Mrs. Oliver told me he's been taking big bread from her. He"s—"

"Stealing, you mean?" Shayne asked sharply.

"Naw, naw," Sam said. "Maxwell don't steal. he don't have to steal. He's already got it made. Why, you should see that pad of his!"

"So how was he taking Clara Oliver?"

"He hasn't been *taking* her, Shayne! I didn't mean it that way! I meant . . ." The youth stopped suddenly, then blurted, "Well, hell, I don't know *what* I mean! All I know is, Mrs. Oliver said she was laying out big bread to Maxwell in exchange for some heavy vibes from him. Okay, she liked the

guy's music, but do you know she spread fifteen thou on him? Man, that's heavy spending for a couple of rap sessions!"

"And you haven't figured out how Maxwell Poland got that fancy pad of his, Sam, how he keeps the lights burning or where your monthly C-notes come from?" Shayne said sarcastically.

The youth swelled, looked ready to flare in defense of Poland again, then dropped his eyes.

"The guy's a con man, Sam. Go get the manager. If you don't come back with him, I'll figure you killed Mrs. Oliver, I'll figure you're hotfooting it. I'll be coming after you. *Move* boy!"

Sam Goldtree almost leaped through the doorway.

Shayne returned to the body. Clara Oliver had been at-

tacked from the rear, probably without warning. It could mean she had opened her door to the attacker, had been acquainted with her killer, been comfortable in his or her presence, had turned her back, perhaps to go to a chair.

Her attire remained neat in death. So sexual motive appeared to be out. That left greed, revenge, fear or panic.

And possibly a tape recording . . .

VI

SHAYNE FOUND THE battery-operated recorder tucked between the cups of her brassiere. He stood, pocketed the recorder, went into the bedroom of the cabana and stared at the open and empty jewel box in the open drawer of the nightstand. He studied the box minutely. It had been scooped clean. He muttered an oath as his thoughts became scrambled. Since finding the corpse, he had been mentally inundated with Maxwell Poland, a con man's possible roles in murder. But now . . .

Had Clara Oliver only been the victim of a B&E man, a common, everyday, run-of-the-mill thief who worked the hotels? Was her death the result of her returning to her cabana at the wrong moment, panic by the thief.

Shayne returned to the front room, inventoried again. She lay sprawled with her feet toward the front door. She could have twisted in the fight for her life, but there was no other evidence of struggling.

Shouldn't the victim be rumpled, her blouse pulled from her pants top, at least wrinkled, perhaps a slit of torn cloth, a missing button, a few strands of the coiffed hair out of place?

There was nothing. Eliminate the grimace, the normal muscle distortion, the red-and-black strip of cloth yanked into her neck flesh, and the victim was tidy.

Shayne went into the bedroom again, stood bent over the open drawer of the nightstand. He imagined hearing a key being fitted into the front door lock. He took a second for natural reaction of surprise, then dashed out of the bedroom and across the front room. He was exposed to an opening door all the way, and ripped off his necktie as he ran. He slammed himself against the wall behind the door, imagined it opening wide and Clara Oliver walking in.

He stepped forward, looped the necktie over an imaginary head and yanked. He wrapped the tie and held on, moved on

into the room. He held the ghost victim in the death loop until she went limp. And then he allowed her body to fall forward.

It could have happened that way, but the killer would have had to be swift. There was total exposure to the opening door all the way from bedroom to wall. And how long did it take to open a door?

Of course, if the killer were already plastered against the wall, waiting, when Clara Oliver opened the door and came inside . . .or if Clara Oliver, in the cabana, had answered a knock, been acquainted and comfortable in the presence of the knocker, had turned her back . . . .

But where did an empty jewelry box fit then? Had theft been actual motive or an afterthought?

In either case, did that eliminate young Sam Goldtree as a suspect? Wouldn't the youth be running with his loot? Or was Sam Goldtree a cagey little monster? Had he wormed his way in with Clara Oliver, spotted the take, killed, lifted and put heavy anchors on his feet—knowing flight would only bring suspicion and eventually cops swooping down?

Sending Sam after a hotel manager might have been a dumb move. A detective could have handed himself a long and tedious hunt.

Mike Shayne left the cabana. Light rain lashed at him but the heavy stuff was still offshore, maybe a half mile away. He started down the sidewalk. It was deserted now. Then he saw two yellow slickers come out of the hotel entrance. Sam Goldtree was inside one of them.

Shayne slid into the thick foliage of the oasis and squatted, watched the youth and a harried-looking man hustle past. He waited until they had disappeared inside cabana eight, then dashed to the hotel lobby.

Inside, he brushed water from his coatsleeves, yanked off his hat and snapped it against his thigh. Palm House guests were snuggling in for the storm quickly. He clomped on the hat and hustled. Clara Oliver's recorder in his pocket was burning a hole. He wondered what was on it.

He hit the street door, then curved back fast into the lobby. Three men were leaving a sedan outside. He recognized one of the men, one of Peter Painter detectives—which he did not need at the moment. Especially with a lifted recorder in his coat pocket.

He headed swiftly toward a small red script wall sign that

said COCKTAILS. Beneath the sign a blue-coated bellhop expertly swept aside strings of dangling entrance shells and whisked into the lobby. Balancing a small tray containing a polished silver ice bucket and two sparkling glasses, he curved toward the elevator.

Shayne rolled over the initial jolt of recognition and managed to capture the bellboy's free arm before he could enter the cab. The bellboy had appeared at the cigar counter the previous evening and had been in his Flagler Street office that morning.

"Henry," said Shayne politely, turning the youth, "back into the bar. You move along just like you forgot something. If you don't—your head is going to wind up inside that ice bucket."

"M-Mr. Shayne," the bellhop stammered. "I gotta make the room call. If I don't, it's my job!"

"Just move along nice and easy, Henry," said the detective, obliquely eyeing the three cops, who were at the main desk.

He took the youth through the beads and then removed the tray and put it on the bar. A burly bartender, who limped, looked surprised. Shayne dropped a bill on the tray. "Send me a Martell and ice-water chaser—and get another delivery boy."

An unspoken message passed between the detective and the bartender. Customer and mixer understood.

Shayne put the bellhop into a booth and sat opposite him. "Find your wife, Henry?"

"L-Look, yesterday a guy—I don't know him, he was here yesterday, he ain't here today—gives me fifty bucks and wants me to find out if you're really Mike Shayne, a Miami private snooper. He even gives me the address of your office. I seen you when you checked in yesterday afternoon, see, and then again at the cigar counter last night. You're in here as somebody named Vought, then at the cigar counter somebody calls you Shayne.

"Okay, that ain't no sweat off me. Lots of people check in under phony names. But then this guy comes on me, see? And he's offering bread. Big bread—fifty. All he wants me to do is be there this morning, see if you come in, see if you are the same guy who checked in here as Mr. Vought."

"And you got the message to him how, Henry?"

"He was still here this morning. He checked out around ten. I don't know him, Mr. Shayne, honest."

"The guy wouldn't happen

to be Maxwell Poland, would it?"

"Naw, naw . . . *who*? I don't know no Maxwell Poland."

"Or Sam Goldtree?"

"Well, yeah . . . . that name rings a bell. Oh, yeah, he's one of the beachies. He works here, like me. Except he works outside on the beach, down at the cabanas, you know? I see him around."

"You don't do a little hustling for Maxwell Poland—along with Sam?"

"Naw. I never heard of no Maxwell Poland. Can I go now, Mr. Shayne?"

A pert waitress appeared at the booth, put the two glasses before the detective, acted as though Henry Carter didn't exist, then disappeared. Shayne glanced toward the bartender. He got a back. The bartender was busy looking in the opposite direction.

Then a man in a light suit came through the dangling seashells and stood at the booth. He bristled. "My name is Mr. Driscoll. I am the assistant manager at the Palm House," he told the detective.

He glanced at the bellhop. "Henry, you are needed at the desk."

"Yes, sir!"

Henry Carter scooted from the booth and disappeared through the shells as if he was being carried on the gale winds outside.

Driscoll drew himself as tall as his five foot-two would allow and said, "If you are a guest here, sir, I request that you consider our condition this afternoon. The storm is a bit unusual. Our people are quite busy. If you are not a guest, then I insist that you depart. And since you have not finished your drink, the bar will reimburse your payment."

Shayne drank the cognac, went to the bar and laid out a palm. "The change, Mac—including the small coins."

The burly bartender complied stoically. Then he dipped into the washbasin under the bar. "I'm an ex-cop, Red, got a slug in my leg, and I can't afford to lose my job. Part of that job is spotting trouble in here." The words came floating up from the washbin.

"Catch you again someday."

"Try a Sunday afternoon. Slow traffic. And I like cognac, too."

Shayne felt a finger tapping his shoulder blade. He whipped around and looked down on Driscoll. The assistant manager kept a stony face, swept a hand toward the dangling seashells.

Shayne went into the lobby. Across it he saw Henry

Carter talking to a yellow slicker. The face hanging out of the slicker belonged to Sam Goldtree.

Driscoll walked with Shayne to the front doors. The detective used long strides, forcing the little man to hustle. Curious people were banked against the doors, watching the sheets of rainwater whip across the open area. Even the doorman in the tall black hat and white gloves stood with his nose almost pressed against the glass.

Shayne went outside to an immediate drenching and ran for his Buick.

VII

HE SAT, DRIPPING RAINWATER and scowling blackly without heeding the rain that lashed against the windshield. He got out a crumpled cigaret. It was damp. He nursed it alive with a match and pulled gratefully.

Sam Goldtree and Henry Carter were in cahoots, obviously. Both were moonlighting for Maxwell Poland? Why not? The Palm House was a large hotel. A con man could use a good inside boy, a good outside boy, one to patrol the corridors, one to patrol the sand. So who had spotted Jack T. Vought as a phony? Score one for Peter Painter, chief of Miami Beach detectives.

Shayne had been at the cigar counter when Painter breezed into the hotel lobby. Henry had been at the cigar counter. Painter had recognized the redhed, but not as Jack T. Vought. He had bleated, "Shayne!"

Henry did not know Peter Painter, he did not know Jack T. Vought, he did not know anyone named Shayne. All Henry knew was that something was not kosher with Mr. Vought. Then Painter had said he had a speaking engagement at the hotel. Easy enough for a bellhop to check out the evening's banquet dinner speakers—and one turns out to be the chief of Miami Beach detectives who has called Mr. Vought Mr. Shayne, and . . .

Bellhop hits phone booth, relays information he has gleaned by chance. Large pat on the head. Then, an hour later, bellhop *receives* phone call. It turns out there is a man named Mike Shayne who is a Miami private detective.

Mr. Shayne might very well be acquainted with Mr. Peter Painter, chief of Miami Beach detectives. Could Henry manage to be in a Flagler Street office in Miami the next day? Just to get a look at Mr. Shayne? Just to see if Mr.

Shayne might also be Mr. Vought?

For fifty clams Henry Carter would do a handstand on the ledge of a tall building.

The Buick started and came alive. Mike Shayne gunned the motor and it warmed. He eased out to Collins Avenue, pulling on headlights. But he didn't have to worry about traffic. It was at a standstill. All he had to do was weave a slow careful path in and out of the vehicles stalled in the street river.

When he arrived at the Flagler Street office building, he found it empty. Because of the threat of the storm, employees in the various offices had been told to go home early. There was only Jeff, an aged black elevator operator, who sat on his three-legged wooden stool with a gaping door beckoning. Soul music filled the elevator. It came from a pocket portable radio on the black man's shirt front.

Jeff flashed a large smile, full of white teeth. "Kinda lonesome, sittin' here this evenin', Mr. Shayne, but it's dry. Bad storm out there. Miss Lucy done gone long time ago."

"Un-huh," Shayne nodded

Jeff said, "Building's gonna crash down in the wind, it's gonna be this one crashin' on me. It's where I spend my time,

it's where I'm gonna be buried if'n I get a choice. But you-all better get out of them duds, Mr. Shayne. You is soakin' and in this air-conditionin' you-all gonna get your death of—and I don't think you interested in gettin' buried yet, here nor no place."

Shayne used the door key. The building had a hollow sound. He sloshed across the outer office, flipped on a wall light and entered his private office. He put the recorder on the desk, found Kleenex in Lucy Hamilton's desk drawer and removed the dampness from the recorder.

Then he went to a filing cabinet behind his desk, yanked open a drawer, removed the half-bottle of cognac. He had a healthy slug and spotted the freshly laundered white shirt in the back of the drawer. It was his emergency shirt.

He dropped it on the desk and carried the bottle to a closet. There were a pair of faded jeans and scruffed tennis

shoes inside. A private detective had to be ready for anything, even an occasional trip to a beach with a pleading—and now and then quite promising—secretary.

He peeled off the gun rig and got out of the soggy clothing, stripped to the buff, then stood for a moment looking around the office. He swept up the bottle, drank from it. A strong sense of esoteric freedom washed him.

He went to the closet again and yanked on the jeans. He took the tennies to the desk, snapped out the shirt, slid into it. He left the tails outside the jeans and wriggled his bare feet into the tennies. Then he pulled up the player and put the tape on it, caught the bottle in his hand, sat back and listened.

Clara Oliver named her killer.

" . . .no, Hank . . .no, *don't*! Hank . . . you're *choking* me . . . *you're* . . ."

That was it. Clara Oliver's words slowly melted into a dying gurgle.

Shayne sat without moving for a long time. Hank? Henry Carter, the bellhop?

He replayed the tape three times, listening for something he might have missed. There was nothing, only Clara Oliver's gasping words as she went down.

He got up and paced. One question had been answered. Clara Oliver had not been killed by a stranger.

But how did the jewelry heist figure now? Had Henry Carter, doing some moonlighting on his own, been interrupted by the woman returning to her cabana? And where did the red-and-black necktie fit? Bellhops at the Palm House did not wear neckties.

Unless Henry had killed before going on duty that day.

Shayne continued to pace. He didn't like the smell of what he was getting. The phone on his desk jangled. He swept it up without thinking. "Mike Shayne Investigations."

"Yeah?" said the voice in his ear. "Hey, man, sorry. Got the wrong horn."

Shayne threw the phone together, returned to his chair. There he nursed the cognac and his thoughts through five more playings of the tape. Then he turned off the player and sat hunched over his desk, elbows and forearms propping him as he stared into the outer office without seeing it.

Hank, Hank—Henry, Henry. The redhead pushed his imagination to its outer limit. The only way he could buy Henry Carter as a killer was via panic. If Henry was on duty that morning, if Henry saw

Clara Oliver going into the hotel coffee shop late in the morning, if Henry was light-fingered, then Henry might have been trapped in the cabana, might have panicked and killed.

Except there was that damned cheap red-and-black necktie!

Shayne telephoned the Palm House; got a hotel personnel employee. "Detective Mike Shayne. Was your bellhop Henry Carter on duty this morning?"

"Henry Carter? Just one moment, sir."

Shayne could hear excited voices in the background. And then the voice was back in his ear strong. "I had to check the daily work roster to be sure, sir. Yes, Carter had duty this morning."

"And was there."

"He checked through the time clock promptly at nine a.m., sir. We at the Palm House are terribly disturbed by all of this, sir. We do try to put together a thorough background check on all our employees. Really, it is quite extensive, but sometimes . . .

"Well, some things, some potentials about people, do get past us or are never indicated, of course. But when they do come to light, we are quick to rectify, naturally. As in Henry Carter's case, he no longer is a member of the Palm House staff."

"How come?"

"WH-AT? Well you people *did* find the missing jewelry in his car, and you *have* arrested him, and . . ."

The voice let the words dangle and Shayne spoke into the phone as he stood behind his desk. "Yeah, pal, see what you mean. Okay, thanks for your help."

"Anytime at all, Detective Shayne. You will find us cooperative with the police here. We would like to feel your assistance never is or will be needed, but that can not be, of course. We *are* in the hotel business, and we deal in people, so—"

"Yeah, know what you mean." The redhead interrupted. "Who can figure people."

"Exactly."

Shayne put the phone together and stood in deep contemplation. Painter's cops had found Clara Oliver's jewels in Henry Carter's car. Carter lifted and killed, but still hung around in the afternoon to hustle suitcases and provide room service? The kid was nuts.

Or was he being railroaded?

The phone under Shayne's hand jangled again. He scowled

at it, debated answering, then swept it up.

"Shayne," he snapped, straightening a cigaret in his fingers of one hand.

"Jeff, Mr. Shayne," said the black. "I'm in my elevator, down here in the lobby with the door open. There are two men outside looking in your car. It's still raining dogs, but I can see them. Oh-oh—here they come! They're angry lookin' dudes. I can take them a floor above you, then back to yours."

"Heat?"

"Tha's what he looked like to me. I gotta get off this phone."

"I'll be on the floor below. Catch me on your way down, Jeff."

"Un-huh."

Shayne scooped pocket possessions from the desk top, dropped the bottle of cognac inside the file drawer and slammed the drawer shut. He snatched up his gun rig and the tape, kicked the player back into the corner and bolted. He stopped at Lucy Hamilton's desk, grabbed Kleenex and wrapped the tape, stuffed it in his pocket.

Leaving the lights burning but locking the door of his office, he bolted along the corridor past the elevator doors toward the red light of the fire escape door. He danced down the iron stairway and into another corridor, returned to the elevator bank.

Jeff was coming down. His light held briefly on the floor above and then moved again. Doors in front of Shayne whisked open and he was confronted by a blank-faced Jeff who sat on a three-legged stool. Music came from the pocket radio.

"Goin' down, sir."

Shayne folded a bill and stuffed it in the pocket behind the radio.

"They's fuzz from the Beach, Mr. Shayne," said the black man.

He took the elevator down past the lobby and into the basement. The doors opened and Shayne stepped out. But Jeff put a restraining hand on him.

"Cool, man. Those two up there are gonna be a bit busy and if they don't wait for old Jeff to fetch them, they've got a heap of runnin' downstairs to do. I've got a raincoat in my locker—fella left it in my elevator once—never come back. It's been hangin' there a year, waitin' for him."

The black man went to the locker, opened it, took out the coat, shook his head. "Some folks are sure wasteful. Those are good threads. 'Course you might stretch 'em a mite."

Shayne took the tape recording from the pocket of the jeans, put it on the shelf of the locker. "Okay, Jeff?"

"Nobody never gets in ol' Jeff's locker. Ain't nothun in it. Everybody knows that."

The coat was a snug fit, but it covered the shoulder holster and .45.

Shayne smiled and said, "Thanks, Jeff."

Jeff lifted a hand, then became still as the radio music in his pocket faded off fast. A voice said, We interrupt for this news bulletin just in from the Miami Beach police department. A suspect being quizzed about he murder of a wealthy New York City guest at the Palm House Hotel today has escaped from custody.

The suspect, an employee of the hotel, managed to bolt from an interrogation room at Miami Beach police headquarters. He fled through a squad room of detectives, downstairs and out of the building. Chief of Detectives Peter Painter had no comment. Details of the escape and search for the man will be given as we receive them in our newsroom. And now back to the music . . ."

Shayne moved to a stairway that would take him up to a lobby door near the front entrance of the building. He had occasionally used the route before and knew that the door was locked on the lobby side but would open from the stairwell.

His exit had to be quick. Two Painter detectives were upstairs. At least one more would be outside, watching the building doors from a parked car. It hadn't been great detective work on Painter's part. All he had to do was see the victim. He'd remember the Palm House cigar-counter introduction. With Henry Carter in custody, there wasn't much doubt the redhead's name had been banged around.

Shayne stepped into the lobby and moved out the front doors of the building immediately. He tucked in his head and dashed across the sidewalk and around the front end of the Buick. The rain had let up slightly. Maybe it meant the hurricane finally had settled on a northerly path. As he leaped into the Buick, he heard the shout from down the street: "Hey!"

Headlights behind him came alive as he gunned the Buick motor. Shayne slammed into reverse, roared back toward the headlights. They had started forward, but they dipped suddenly toward the street. The sedan had been braked. Shayne continued to push the Buick backward, mov-

ing in on the sedan. The headlights behind him danced away as the driver of the sedan also went into reverse.

Mike Shayne shifted into forward gear. There was a grinding and back tires howled protest. The rear end of the Buick swayed slightly, then he shot it forward, putting distance between himself and the headlights behind him. But the sedan driver was not finished. He moved out and his lamps became larger in Shayne's rearview mirror as he flashed through the puddles of Flagler Street.

Shayne slowed abruptly. The headlights leaped at him. He whipped into a sidestreet, skidding the Buick. But he had it under control as he watched the sedan slide broadside through the turn. The driver was an expert.

He managed to right the patrol car, came on fast. Shayne let him come then made another turn into another street. This time the sedan slid past. Its wheels were turned, but the momentum of the car did not follow them. The sedan disappeared behind the corner.

Shayne jammed on the brakes of the Buick, snapped the steering wheel. The rear end came around in a wide wild skid. He applied pressure to the accelerator at just the right instant and the Buick shot back toward the street he had just left.

He glanced down the street to his right as he turned left. And he knew satisfaction. He had played a hunch right. The sedan driver—missing the turn—had decided on whipping around the block. He evidently figured he'd regain lost distance to be behind the redhead again.

Except that this time he was wrong.

Shayne moved back toward Flagler, eased off on the speed. Painter's boy had been lost. The rain slowed to a drizzle. Traffic was beginning to move again. Shayne kept an eye on the rearview mirror. There were a couple of car headlights behind him now, the single lamp of a motorcyle, but none of the lights bothered him.

He turned onto Flagler, saw one of the cars and the cyclist follow. Cyclists were a breed of their own. To be out cruising on a cycle while the edge of a hurricane was hanging over a city called for pure dedication—or stupidity.

The cyclist suddenly moved up fast. He was beside Shayne. A cop?

A glance told the detective the helmeted cyclist was not a bike cop. But Shayne frowned. The cyclist was riding herd. Warning bells clanged inside

the redhead's skull. He lifted his foot from the accelerator. The lift kept him from becoming a bloody corpse.

He heard the rapid fire of the semi-automatic handgun. But instead of window glass showering him, instead of holes in his head suddenly being formed, there was only the cyclist suddenly ahead of him, swinging an extended arm back. A slug splintered the windshield on the passenger side of the Buick and whacked into the upsholstery. Then Shayne was busy taking the Buick into the curb.

The cyclist roared off into the light rain and disappeared.

VIII

SHAYNE SAT SLOUCHED, sucking air. The .45 in the rig under the borrowed raincoat was a heavy weight. He caught himself staring stonily down the street.

Watching for a cyclist to return? Someone he could shoot off a seat, send man and machine into crazy spins?

Violent death had been close—too close. Even a hardnosed private eye should be allowed a moment for reflection.

He clamped the steering wheel, pulled himself up in the seat. Reflection? Where had the cyclist come from? Who was he? Why the attack? He didn't want the goon dead—he wanted him alive, to provide answers.

Traffic continued to move along Flagler, was picking up in volume. No one had stopped at the scene of an assassination attempt. Everyone was heading for the comfort of home and TV, job and activity, drink and tranquility.

The activity was behind Shayne, back along the sidewalk. There were artificial light and a scurrying of shadow people on the walk, gathering in clusters. It was where the slugs probably had slammed into a building.

The clusters meant there would be police soon.

Mike Shayne put the Buick in gear and eased away from the scene. The phone call in his office, the man who had said he had the wrong number. Legitimate? Just some guy who was careless in dialing? Or an assassin pinpointing the victim?

But why was a private eye a target? Someone out of the past? Someone out of the present? Was there something he didn't see in Clara Oliver's murder?

Maybe he had seen too much and didn't know it.

Shayne rolled to 3535 Cortez, turned into the apartment complex, braked in a stall as if

he belonged and left the Buick. No rain fell now, but the air remained heavy. He walked back into the units, finally spotted a man squatted on the edge of a roofed patio. A poodle about ten yards out in the glistening grass, also squatted.

The poodle gave a sharp little yip at the detective's approach and straightened. The man also rose. "Clarence . . ." he said to the dog, not too threateningly.

"Looking for Ten D," said Shayne.

"D . . .D . . ." The guy looked off into the distance. "Building D is on the other end. Ten, that'd be one of the ground-floor units."

"This way?" said Shayne, pointing straight ahead.

"Yeah."

Shayne walked through the complex, moving along the gaslighted walks as if he were a resident with a destination. He found Building D and cruised past it. It was a two story unit with four apartments, two up, two down, on each end. Light came from each of the units on his side.

He spotted a Pinto station wagon with a watermelon dent in the hood and kept on moving. He came to an empty swimming pool area, the water blue and bright in the below-surface pool-wall spotlights. Rain had chased the bathers. He went on to a squat square building marked Office and spotted a coin-operated cigaret machine outside. It was salvation. He stopped and got a pack and turned back to the units. He had not spotted any foreign shadows lurking among the parked vehicles, but if eyes were there, all they had seen was a man buying a pack of butts.

Painter could have watchdogs keeping an eye on Sam Goldtree. The prospect was slim with Henry Carter in custody, but Henry was no longer in custody. Henry had fled Painter's coop. An angry Peter Painter would slap a shadow on the Kremlin—if there were the remotest chance Henry Carter might show there.

There was a bright light over the front door of each unit. Anyone standing under it was totally exposed. Moving along the shadowed sidewalk outside 10D, Shayne fired his butt into the wet grass and cut to the door. He knocked heavily.

Nothing.

"Come on, Sam," he said. "Snap it up. Mike Shayne. It's better for you if I'm not seen."

He heard a rustle behind the door, then it was opened a crack and an eye appeared. He put a hand against the door, shoved gently and stepped in-

side, closed it behind him. The front room of the apartment was neat and conventionally furnished. There was a small black-and-white TV in a corner but it was not on. He noticed a telephone on a small stand.

Sam Goldtree and a tall slender girl stood side by side, holding hands. Sam looked jumpy. The girl showed a little more cool.

She was a beautiful girl, maybe twenty-one. She was suntanned an even brown color, smooth of skin, unpainted, her long ash-blonde hair drawn away from her face and disappearing behind square shoulders. She wore a bright purple T-shirt and denim shorts cut off high, tiny threads plastered against her thighs. She was barefooted. Her only sign of tension were bare toes that worked against the carpet.

Sam Goldtree relaxed slightly. "I almost didn't recognize you, Mr. Shayne. I mean—jeans on a private detective?"

"Got a little wet earlier," Shayne said, moving into the front room of the apartment. He removed the tight raincoat and sat on the front edge of a love seat. "Your Mr. Driscoll tossed me out of the Palm House. If you hadn't been so busy talking to Henry Carter, you might have noticed."

Sam started, but it was the girl who came on strong.

"Mister," she snapped, "I don't give two hoots in hell who you are—cop, bad man or otherwise. I don't like guns! My daddy shot himself in the head with one. I took it from his dead hand."

"Tish!" Sam pleaded.

"Tell him to get that damned thing off. Better—tell him to get lost!"

She whipped around, turned her back to Shayne. She stood tall and straight and unmoving, just a hint of the underside of taut buttocks exposed by the cutoffs. Shayne stared at her spine for a moment, then stripped out of the shoulder rig and stuffed it and the .45 out of sight under the love seat.

"Got a cold beer?" he asked. "Or maybe some wine?"

She turned back to him, stared hard. Her eyes were a pale blue. She continued to stare for several seconds. It was as if she were searching for something. Then she asked, "What's this all about?"

"I haven't got it pegged yet, honey."

"My name is Tish Smith. And it is my real name. He is Samuel Goldtree, and I am Tish Smith."

Then she went past him into a tiny kitchenette. He heard the rattle of glass tin-

kling, the snap of a refrigerator door. She returned with three small goblets and a wicker basket of supermarket chianti. She put the goblets on the carpet, squatted and poured. She lifted a glass to the redhead, her blue eyes defiant. Then she turned and sat where she was, one knee cocked high, an elbow hooked around it. Her face was no more than two feet in front of the detective's.

"Lay it all out, man—simple."

Shayne shook his head and sat back on the seat. He looked straight at Sam. "*You* lay it out for me, Sam. I want Henry Carter and you and Maxwell Poland."

"Henry didn't do it, Mr. Shayne." the youth said. He didn't kill Mrs. Carter. And that business about the jewelry—that's spacy!"

"Cops found the jewelry in his car at the hotel."

"Yeah, yeah," Sam said "But somebody is putting them on! Someone is laying a heavy number on Henry."

"He's not a killer, and he's not a thief. He doesn't have an eye out for a score. He's the All-American boy. Sam, how long have you two been setting up people like Mrs. Oliver for Maxwell Poland? Maybe the scent of roses got to Henry. Maybe he figured to pick up a rose or two and cut a trail."

The youth folded into a sitting position behind Tish Smith. He kept shaking his head. "Naw, you're on the wrong wave length about Henry, man. Look, me'n Henry—"

His head came up as he cut off the words. He looked as if he were searching deep inside his skull. The elbow braced on his knee bobbed.

"Look," he began again. "Those people at the Palm House, they ain't exactly living on food stamps, you know? If they was, they wouldn't be there. And some of them are spacy. I mean, man, just plain damned crazy spaced out.

"They don't know what they're lookin' for, just somethun. Bread? Means nothun. They *got* bread. All they're lookin' for is a place to spread it. It makes a cat like me—a cat with a hundred in a savings and loan, a hundred and ten this week, I guess—and four in the checking until next payday—it makes me meow in envy, Mr. Shayne."

"How about in greed?"

"No." The youth continued to shake his head. Then he stopped suddenly, looked straight at the detective. "Yeah, man, I'd like to take some of 'em. Me'n Tish could live good just on what they

drop along the way. But, no, I've never picked up a loose dime. And neither has Henry Carter.

"Sure, Maxwell Poland got us the work at the Palm House. Yeah, me'n Henry talk about different guests, size them for each other occasionally. And we've pointed some to Maxwell, people who lean to his thing. But that's all we've ever done, Mr. Shayne. Pointed."

Shayne stared hard at the youth for a couple of seconds. "Got any nominations?"

"Any nom—? No! I've been trying to figure it ever since the fuzz landed! I can't!"

"How does Poland fit?"

"What?"

"Poland, a killer?" Shayne said impatiently.

"You're puttin' me on." Sam said.

"Poland, the rigger. Poland puts out a contract—gets a pal to do the dirty work?"

"Spacy! Why would Maxwell want to kill Mrs. Oliver? Why would he lay it on Henry? Henry'n me, we always been straight with him."

"Mr. Shayne," Tish Smith interrupted in a soft voice. "What if—she said slowly—"another Palm House employee was in the process of robbing the woman and she walked in on the robber? What if the robber killed—then became very frightened and ran—suddenly realized the stolen jewelry could be incriminating, got rid of it—and *just happened* to pick Henry's car in the parking lot to stash it?"

The detective yanked an ear lobe with forefinger and thumb.

"Or what if," the girl continued, "a hotel robber came in off the street? Same thing."

The blue eyes pierced his for a moment. Then she shrugged, sipped wine again. "Or, what if Sam is wrong about Henry? What if Henry killed and stole the jewelry and was caught?" She waved a loose hand. "I suppose that is pretty simple thinking to a private detective, but it could have happened."

"Un-huh," Shayne agreed.

"But I can see you don't like my theories." She shrugged again, sipped. "So if Henry Carter is so damn innocent, why did he break out tonight?"

Shayne lifted a shaggy eyebrow. "You heard?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Shayne. After all, Sam and I are not lost totally in the throb of this aging sexual revolution. We do listen to a radio occasionally, watch television, eat." She lifted the goblet. "Sip. "All we haven't done—considered proper in the eyes of some—is go to a courthouse and get a piece of paper

that says we can sleep together. But you know what? We have one small bed back there in our bedroom, no headboard, no footboard, no colorful spread. But man, it's functional. We sleep good on it—without paper."

Shayne walked the width of the room, whipped around on the girl. "Save the preaching for another day, young lady. I'm up to my ears in a murder investigation and so far the only walking leads I have are your boyfriend here and his pal Henry!"

Tish Smith surprised him. She reached under the couch and yanked out the shoulder rig. She removed the .45 and pointed its muzzle straight at Shayne.

IX

SHAYNE REMAINED ROOTED. The pale blue eyes held him. They did not waver. Nor did the gun muzzle.

"Tish!" Sam Goldtree exclaimed.

"Be quiet," she said in an even voice. She lowered the gun muzzle until it was pointed at the detective's knees, eased off the safety with a thumb.

"Believe me, Mr. Shayne, I know how to use one of these. I'm a Texas girl. My daddy—before he blew his brains out—taught me how to shoot. And if I have to . . . "

She let the words hang as she rose with a fluid movement. Shayne breathed. She wasn't going to kill, but she could wound. He kept his eyes on her as she went to the telephone stand in the corner.

"When he came to the door, Sam, he didn't want to be seen," she said. "That means he's bad news for us. Somebody's chasing him, he's afraid of the fuzz, something. Hell, maybe *he* killed Mrs. Oliver. How do we know."

"What are you doing?" bleated the youth.

She lifted the phone, cradled it between chin and ear. A long finger went to the dial slots. "Calling fuzz. I don't want him here."

"For Chris' sake!"

Sam threw his arms wide, went to the girl, took the phone from her shoulder and the gun from her hand. He put a kiss on her forehead and said softly, "Cool it, baby. Everything's gonna be smooth again. The man's gonna fly."

He went to the shoulder rig, stuffed the gun in it, crossed the room to Shayne's borrowed coat, handed both to the detective. "Like the jet planes, man. Okay?"

"You own a motor bike, Sam?" Shayne asked, sliding

into the rig and fastening the straps.

The youth frowned. "That's a crazy question. Where would I get bread for a bike?"

"Henry Carter have a bike?"

"No." Sam shook his head. "Henry ain't much on guts."

"It took some guts to break from the cops."

"Not guts, Mr. Shayne." Sam Goldtree said flatly. "That had to be fear." Then, over his shoulder, "Baby, I'm on your wave length now. Call the fuzz. The man ain't flying."

"Somebody on a bike tried to knock me off on my way over here tonight," said Shayne. "That has to be someone out of my past or someone who is afraid because I hooked up with Clara Oliver. I'm riding the second supposition."

"Knock you *off*?" Sam Goldtree looked startled. Beyond him Tish Smith stood tall and frozen with a hand on the phone again.

"With bullets." said Shayne, shrugging into his coat. "You never refer to your friend as Hank. Why?"

The youth looked totally perplexed for a moment, then went to the girl. He wrapped an arm across her shoulders, squeezed her. Both continued to stare at the detective. Neither said a word.

"Henry—Hank," pressed Shayne.

"Henry is Henry," the youth said.

"You know anyone called Hank?"

The phone under the girl's hand jangled. Sam jerked and the girl's fingers squeezed down tight. Neither moved as the phone jangled insistently. Sam finally reached across her, listed the receiver, said, "Hello?"

He listened, turned his back on Shayne and jammed the receiver against his ear. "Oh, Chris'! Where are —" He cut off the words. "Hey, man, we can't *make* it. Yeah. Sounds cool, but we got something heavy going on this end. Yeah, got a man here!"

He listened again, then, "Mary J.? Yeah. Got a small bag—ounce or two. Yeah, you want? So come to the door in a few minutes. Our man is cuttin'. Okay. See you—Carl."

When Sam Goldtree put the phone together and looked at Shayne again, the muscles of his face were playing leapfrog and his eyes wouldn't remain still. He flopped his hands. "Hey, go—okay?"

"You know anyone named Hank?" Shayne repeated.

"Yeah—no! Henry yeah, Hank, no." He came across the room. "Lemme think on it!"

He caught Shayne's arm, but the detective didn't move, said, "Okay, got any ideas about where Henry Carter might hole up?"

"Get *out* of here!" the youth shouted.

He attempted to yank Shayne, but the detective clamped a hand on his wrist and wrenched his arm free. "Maybe at Maxwell Poland's house?" the redhead pressed.

"No, no, he ain't at —"

Sam again chopped off the words. "Beat it!"

Shayne snapped a look at the girl. She hadn't moved from the telephone stand. She had lost a little of her luster, but she didn't look as if she were going to come apart. She was taut, her pale blue eyes brilliant.

Shayne knew that if he had the power to see inside her head he'd find whirling thoughts as she groped and pieced. He also knew that she would put the thoughts together, find those that meshed, cast aside the chaff. She'd put together what they had, map a plan, make decisions.

Sam Goldtree would go along with her.

"Couple of things to keep in mind when 'Carl' calls again, Tish," said the detective directly to her. "Running doesn't fit him. He doesn't know how to run or where to run to—if he can't go to Poland and get help there. He's also got himself a helluva bunch of trouble just because he did run, innocent or guilty. Helping him will get *you* two a helluva bunch of trouble.

"Investigators—police and private—work on logic and contacts. Why am I here, for instance? Because I am investigating the death of a woman at Palm House Hotel and I know that two employees at the hotel were acquainted with the woman. I also know the two employees are friends.

Suddenly one is in trouble and when somebody is in trouble, the logical place to look for help is from a friend. What that means, Tish, is if the cops aren't already staking out this apartment, they will be damned soon. And staking out means they watch the people who go in and out, they follow people who leave.

"I want to talk to Henry. I may be able to help him. At the moment, I'm on his side. Is there a back way out of here?"

She shook her head.

"Well . . ."Mike Shayne drew himself up. "So I step out under the light—and run like hell if someone moves toward me."

"Mr. Shayne?" She cocked her head. "*Why* will you run?"

He gave her an abrupt grin. "Because the police and I do not always see eye to eye on how things should be done. Sorta makes me like you, huh?"

"Sorta." She nodded somberly.

"Is there a bar where I can be found should you want me in the next two—three hours?"

She hesitated. "There's the Keg. When you get out to the street, turn left. It's four blocks down."

He grabbed the door knob. "But no promises, Mr. Shayne," she said from behind him.

He turned, tapped Sam Goldtree's brow with a forefinger as he continued to look at her. "When you two have finished sifting all this in the next hour or so, tell this turkey to at least come up with Hank. He's damned important to me."

He stepped into the brilliant overhead light outside, tucked his head in and moved into the unfriendly darkness of a sidewalk. He moved swiftly watching for sudden movement away from the building wall, listening for the slam of a car door, for footsteps pounding after him.

Nothing.

He breezed back through the complex and got into the Buick. So far, he still was ahead of Peter Painter, but it couldn't last forever. Painter was too good a chief of detectives.

X

THE KEG FEATURED pitcher beer. But there was a cozy neighborhood atmosphere, it was a young person's bar, shorts and cutoffs and T-shirts. Even a big redheaded person who probably looked years beyond jeans and tennies, and who continued to wear a too tight raincoat while sitting alone in a booth didn't draw more than a casual look or two.

There was a back bar that glistened with bottles of assorted spirits. A young hip-looking bartender was working the booths and bar alone. He accepted the order of cognac and ice water chaser with a slight bow of freshly born respect, accepted the folded bill without looking at it.

"My name is Mike Shayne. I may be getting a phone call. I don't want it shouted."

The youth brought the drink and waited to be paid. Shayne lifted a shaggy brow at him, "Kid, you should be working Coral Gables."

"I also should be calling in the fuzz—because you ain't suppose to be wearing heat in a booze house, right?"

"How about if I *am* fuzz?"

"That, friend," said the youth with another bow, during which he magically dropped the folded bill on the table, "makes a whole bunch of difference."

Shayne put the bill in the boy's shirt pocket. "On the other hand, maybe I *am* a hood—and I'm just testing your sensibilities.

The youth raised his palms. "Oh, I'm sensible, fella, very sensible. Make no mistake. You-all want another Martell, just lift a finger."

"I want a phone call," said Shayne.

He got it at ten after one in the morning. Tish Smith said, "Henry finally called again, Mr. Shayne. He's at a movie—downtown. He's been running in and out of them all night, sitting in the dark. But they're all closing, and he doesn't have any more money."

"And?"

"Well—*somebody* has to help him, Mr. Shayne."

"Will you do what I tell you?"

"We will. Sam and I have rapped. But Henry—I don't know. He's scared."

"What's *your* plan with him?"

"We're going down to pick him up. I mean—we're going to try. We haven't been outside since you left, so we don't know if somebody is out there or not. But we're going to drive away. If somebody follows us, we'll go to a pizza place.

"Henry understands. We told him what you said about fuzz maybe watching us and all, so he understands. If we're not at the movie by two, he knows we can't come. Are we doing right, Mr. Shayne?"

"Yes and no," he snapped, "but we're rolling. Okay, drive past here. Don't look for me. *I'll* see *you*. You take Cortez down to Flagler, then stay on Flagler. Can you get to the movie that way?"

"It's the long way, but yes."

"It's important, so don't turn off. Stay on Cortez and on Flagler. I'll be with you at the movie house. What's the name?"

"Arts-Five Theater, Shayne. It's on—"

"The porno house. Yeah, I know," said the redhead.

"Other movies aren't open this late!" the girl sounded defensive.

"If a car follows you when you leave the apartment, don't worry about it," Shayne said. "I'll intercept. That's my end of this deal. When I do, cut like hell for Arts Five. But don't leave there without me. Then we'll all go to a pizza house. Agreed?"

"Mr. Shayne . . ." she paused. "Mr. Shayne, we're not

sure what we're doing—or why."

"Except you know Henry Carter is Sam's friend, and that Henry Carter did not steal from Clara Oliver or kill her."

"Yes, we've decided that much."

"Hank?"

"There's a . . ." She paused, then continued in a rush. "A guy named Hank Davis lives at Maxwell Poland's. He's been there much longer than the others. Mr. Shayne, it was Hank Davis who set up Sam at the Palm House."

She fell silent.

"Tish?"

"Sam doesn't like this—none of it. Maxwell Poland has been good to him. And he doesn't have bad vibes with Hank Davis, either. You've got to understand. But . . ."

"Keep going," Shayne snapped.

"Hank Davis rides a bike."

"And shoots a gun?"

"I don't know that—but he's been in prision. Some kind of murder. He got paroled."

"Some men reform."

"So says the turkey here."

"But you're skeptical?"

"Black and white, man. Just lay it all out simple for this little ol' gal! That's all I ask! Right now, it wouldn't surprise me none if'n my daddy got up out of his grave and said to me, 'Gal, git yo' little ol' tail tucked in. You-all done 'bout to git it shot clean to Amarillo'n back!

"That's the way I feel, Mr. Shayne—in my bones. Things aren't right. I know they aren't right—for me or for Sam. And that's all I'm interested in—me'n Sam. Mr. Shayne, we'll be driving down Cortez in five minues."

They had a tail. Tish Smith was driving the Pinto wagon. Thirty seconds behind it was a small sedan, plain. There were two men in the front seat. Peter Painter detectives, Shayne guessed.

He'd had the motor of the Buick purring for a few seconds, the headlights bright, when the two cars approached from his rear. He had waited politely, pulled into the traffic lane behind the sedan, eased along. He turned onto Flagler with them, cruised for two blocks. The sedan boys had to be getting suspicious by then about the headlights hanging in their mirror. There had been plenty of opportunity to pass. The left lane was empty.

Shayne took a left a the next intersection then gunned the Buick. He cut right at the next intersection. The street flanked Flagler for a few blocks. He pressed on the accelerator, estimated when he

had passed the two cars on Flagler, estimated again when he'd had enough time to drive the block back to Flagler and still intercept.

When he braked at the fourth intersection, he smiled. He had timed it perfectly. The Pinto rolled across in front of him and Shayne shot out into Flagler and then braked as if in panic. The driver of the sedan put it on its nose and skidded toward the Buick, then rocked back in a sudden stop.

The sedan was backed. Headlights were turned behind the detective. He backed as if in confusion, again cut off the sedan. To his left, down Flagler, he saw the Pinto turn off. Tish Smith was doing okay.

Shayne backed slowly into the side street keeping the sedan blocked another few seconds. He saw the driver's door open. A leg came out, and then the leg was drawn back inside and the door snapped as the sedan swung around Shayne's front bumper and shot down Flagler, turned at the next intersection. Shayne waited until it was out of sight before feeding gas to the Buick.

The true test for Tish Smith as a driver attempting to shake a tail was now. Had she made another quick turn?

Shayne wouldn't know until he got to Arts Five.

The Pinto was there, parked at the curb in front of the dim lights. He saw a shadow run from the theater across the sidewalk and dive into it. The Pinto cut out.

Mike Shayne rolled up beside it, waved for Tish Smith to follow. Then he shot ahead and cut into her lane. They cruised for ten minutes before he stopped just short of the entry light of a second-class hotel. He ran back to the Pinto and grabbed the open driver's window before Tish Smith could have a second thought about not sticking around.

"I'm going inside and get a room—for all of us," he told her. "We have to get off the streets and get organized. Anybody got a beef?"

No words came from the Pinto. Tish Smith shut off the motor, doused the headlights.

Shayne popped the window edge with an open palm. "Good. It's the only way we can go for now. I know the night desk man here. It's a small joint. He'll be alone. You watch for me at the door down there. When you see me waving, hotfoot it inside."

The desk man was weathered, bald and wise. He glanced up from a mystery novel, turned down the volume of radio music and grinned all over the vacant lobby when the

redhead appeared before him. "Mr. O'Shayne!" he boomed.

"Mr. Ryan. Need a double, the biggest you got. And there's no luggage, Mr. O'Ryan."

"I'm of a mind you don't even own a suitcase, Mr. O'Shayne," said the desk man with a dead pan. "In all my days, I don't believe I ever seen you carry one." He put a white card on the counter, made a couple of check marks on it with a ballpoint pen. "The name?"

"Mike Shayne, City."

"Ahh—straight! Like me Irish dew the same way, for a fact, I do."

Shayne signed the registration card and put a bill on the desk beside it. "Which should cover room and quart," he said. "Did I hear someone calling you from the back room?"

"That you did, me boy," the desk man turned away. "And it takes me a while to get there and back these days, Mr. O'Shayne."

"About three minutes, Mr. O'Ryan. What you don't see, you don't know should the fuzz come calling."

Mr. O'Ryan reached back and picked up the white card. He put it in a coat pocket. "The police, ahhh! Now there's a fine bunch of young lads—especially the Irish boys."

The room was large. Tish Smith and Sam Goldtree sat side by side on the edge of one double bed. A harried looking Henry Carter sat opposite them on the edge of the other bed. Shayne whipped off the raincoat and lit a cigaret. No one said a word as he began to pace, trailing smoke behind him. They sat silent, worried and expectant.

He stopped suddenly at a full-length door mirror, studied his reflection. Large and hulking, craggy face hanging out like some forbidding figure carved out of a mountain, red-gold beard stubble beginning to show, gray eyes hard, gun rig strapped against a white shirt, no necktie, shirt tails hanging out, faded jeans, tennies. One helluva fine looking specimen of a private detective—especially for three o'clock in the morning!

He turned to fix the worried young trio with the hard gray eyes. "What we've got," he said harshly, "is a woman who was murdered. A woman who was strangled with a necktie and recorded that strangulation. She taped her death, boys and girls. And on that tape, she called her killer Hank."Okay, give me Hank all over again. Give me where he fits. With the murdered woman, with Maxwell Poland, with you three or any one of you three. How do

all of you fit with the dead woman? We go from the top. Got it?"

He stopped, stared hard at Henry Carter. "And we go straight this time around, Henry," he growled.

Henry Carter fidgeted. He couldn't seem to find the strength to lift his head to look at the detective. "I-I'm so—scared, Mr. S-Shayne," he stuttered, "I ain't sure . . .I can't think."

"You do the talking, Henry. I'll do the thinking."

XI

WHEN CLARA OLIVER first checked into the Palm House for a six-month stay, she had been just another potential candidate for membership in Maxwell Poland's Brotherhood of the Yellow Bird. Sam had spotted her because she lived in a cabana and the cabanas were his territory. Sam eventually had taken her to Maxwell Poland. And, yes, Hank Davis was present. Hank Davis was always in Maxwell Poland's presence.

Why the interest in J.T. Vought?

Maxwell Poland insisted on knowing whom his potential candidates associated with.

Why?

Neither Sam nor Henry had ever questioned. Oh, maybe they had *wondered*. But Maxwell Poland was a very sharp man, in tune. And it was no trick to ask a question here and there about people, pass the info back to Poland. Maxwell often responded with extra bread.

Shayne paced the hotel room trailing cigaret smoke. In between drags, he yanked an ear with thumb and forefinger. Poland was a confidence man who never worked the natives, only the wealthy snowbirds down from the north.

He had a heavy at his side, a paroled convict who'd been inside on a murder rap. Poland had a good game plan going, was smart, super-cautious, didn't worry about where the next convert was coming from, lived high, probably had amassed a fortune.

And then a private detective popped up surreptitiously on his horizon. Had that appearance alone been enough to panic him?

Shayne stopped pacing suddenly and stared hard at Sam and Henry. "Either of you ever see Clara Oliver tape recording or walk in on her while she was listening to a tape, pass that bit of information on to Poland?"

"Not me, said Henry.

"Hey, man!" Sam wagged

his head. "That taping—you laid that on us a while ago. I mean, about her taping her own death. That's wild! Tape freaks, yeah! But Mrs. Oliver? No way, man!"

Tish Smith spoke up. "Mr. Shayne, I don't understand either." She was frowning heavily.

"Pocket recorder," said the detective. "She came down here from New York to put Poland in the slammer. She was trying to gather evidence against him via the tapes."

Her frown deepened. "Evidence of what?"

"She was convinced Poland bilked her sister out of a hundred and forty gees, has been bilking many other people, these so-called converts to his brotherhood. She set herself up to be milked. She taped her meetings with Poland. She thought she had evidence, but she wasn't sure. So she hired me to listen to her tapes, give her direction, go after Poland on my own."

"You're saying Maxwell Poland discovered the tapes and killed Mrs. Oliver?"

Mike Shayne tugged at his left ear. "He might or might not know about the tapes, honey. But he does know about me, who I am—thanks to your two bright young pals there. And that could have been enough to trigger the man."

"Into killing her?"

"Having her killed. On a guess, I'd say by his boy Hank."

Tish Smith shook her head. "She was killed just because she hired a private detective?"

"Poland has a lot at stake, doll. Conning is a lucrative business for him. He can't take chances. One little oversight and he crashes."

"Yes, yes. But to have someone killed just because you came into—"

"Some goon on a bike attempted to chop me down, too. And he had to be sitting on that bike in the rain somewhere outside my office building, just waiting for me to leave. He was tossed one small curve in that I had cops on my tail when I did leave the building, but I shook them. Then the goon moved in."

She shook her head again, looked perplexed.

"Mrs. Oliver is already dead," Shayne continued, spreading the pattern for her. "If I go down the pipe, end of the Oliver-Shayne threat to Maxwell Poland. It's that simple, girl."

She stared at him, her pale blue eyes wide. "But Henry? The jewelry theft?"

Shayne shrugged. "Henry is expendable. All Hank has to do is get to Mrs. Oliver without

being seen by Henry, kill her, lift some rocks, plant them in Henry's car. The cops do the rest."

"Then. . . ." She hesitated, cocked her head slightly. "Sam just as easily might have been Henry?"

"Honey," said Shayne, "Sam and Henry—or anyone else working for Poland, I imagine—are little more than pawns to the man."

She shuddered. "That makes Maxwell Poland a very scary man, Mr. Shayne."

Sam Goldtree shot to his feet. "This is wild! You're spaced out, Shayne. You could be all wrong about Mr. Poland, you know."

Shayne snapped, "Henry?"

Henry Carter started. "I dunno. All I know is . . .Jeez, I gotta get out of town."

You make a break for that door and I'll cut your legs out from under you," Shayne said grimly. "Either I take you back to the Miami Beach cops or a lawyer will."

Silence in the room became a roar. Shayne continued, "If you didn't kill, if you didn't steal, why run the rest of your life? Your decision, Henry."

The boy flopped back on the bed and dropped an arm across his eyes. "Okay, so take me," he said after a long time. "I can't afford no lawyer."

Shayne made a phone call. When he put the phone together again, Henry Carter had not stirred. "Jerry August is on his way," said the detective. "He's one of the best legal beagles in town for people in trouble. He'll take you over to the Beach, Henry, post bond. You'll be in your own bed by ten in the morning."

The boy sat up. He looked as if he was being embalmed. "How am I gonna pay?"

"You won't see Jerry coming in here with his hand out," Shayne said, lighting a fresh cigaret. He caught Sam Goldtree and Tish Smith with his eyes. "I'll be leaving with Jerry and Henry," he said. "You two stick here for a few hours, give Jerry time to get Henry on the streets again. That'll take the cops off your backs. Then you can return to your apartment."

The girl rose. She looked as if she were thinking hard again. "I have the feeling, Mr. Shayne, you are shoving us down a hole—and I don't like the feeling."

"I have things to do, honey."

"Like?"

He shook his head.

She stomped a foot in a sudden display of irritation. "Dammit, Mr. Shayne, we're on your *side*!"

He measured her from under drawn down brows, flashed a look at Sam Goldtree. "That right, Sam?"

The youth looked perplexed.

"Decision time for you, too, Sam," Shayne pressed. "Me or Poland?"

The youth began to pace. "Shayne, look . . ."

He stopped, whirled, flopped his arms. "Look, man, Maxwell Poland has been—"

"Yeah, I heard," interrupted the detective. "Good to you. But I also think he's a killer, Sam, and I'm going after him!"

The youth looked surprised. "Now?"

"Out at his place."

"Crazy man! You won't get inside the gate!" He paused. "Okay, so you play Batman, go over the wall. You can't get inside the front door. No way!"

"So I draw him out," said Shayne.

"No way!"

"Yeah, there's a way, Sam," said Shayne. "*You* can get him out for me. You have access to the house. You can get inside. You can scare hell out of Poland for me, get him outside. All you have to tell him is that I have the tapes and they are negotiable—on my terms."

Silence again descended.

Shayne broke it. "If Maxwell Poland is clean, he'll laugh and go back to bed. If he isn't . . ." Shayne shrugged. "At the very least, Sam, you'll know whether you're riding a black horse or a white horse."

Sam Goldtree leaped at the prospect. "Okay, you're on, *man*!"

Shayne shot a look at Tish Smith.

"While I?" she asked.

"Get some sleep."

Dawn had already spread a pale orange glow across the Miami sky when they walked out of the hotel. Jerry August put Henry Carter into a Mercedes, waved Shayne a hand, then rolled off toward Miami Beach. Shayne stabbed air with a finger, pointing Sam Goldtree to the Buick.

Maxwell Poland's layout was in the heart of one of the most exclusive Miami residential areas. It was out where there were space and manicured planting and privacy. The white stone wall across the front of the spread was artistic in design, also formidable. There was a huge iron gate across the driveway.

Sam Goldtree got out of the Buick and leaned in the open window. "You're wrong about Maxwell, man," he said again. "And I'm about to show you how wrong you are."

"So show me," replied Shayne.

Mike was taut inside, his thoughts whirling as he watched the youth open a walk gate and enter the grounds of the estate. He had maneuvered Sam Goldtree into this role. Back in the hotel room, it had been cat and mouse. Entrenched con men didn't leave open doors. He'd needed a key to Maxwell Poland. Sam was the key.

But Sam was stuffed with loyalty to his benefactor. On the other hand, Sam was not a criminal. And Sam had a friend, Henry Carter, who all at once was in a squeeze not of his doing—a squeeze that could be of Maxwell Poland's doing. So Sam had been torn. Which way to go?

He was moving in the direction Shayne wanted him to at the moment. His course might change any second. The detective was apprehensive as the youth disappeared from his sight. The temptation to trail Sam, to burst into the mansion, to browbeat Poland was strong. But Poland had at least one henchman inside. He could have an army. And the house would be *his* battleground. The odds would even some if Poland could be drawn out onto neutral ground.

So Shayne sat tight, drumming his fingernails against the steering wheel as he waited. Movement behind him brought him up in the seat. He stared hard at the reflection of the Pinto in the rearview mirror. He watched Tish park the small car, leave it. She came along the sidewalk, got into the passenger seat of the Buick.

I think you've set up Sam," she said flatly. "He could be in danger."

"What kind of danger?"

"I don't know. I just have a—*feeling*. If all you say about the woman being killed and the jewelry being put in Henry's car is true . . .well, I just have a *feeling*. How come you're sitting out here, Shayne? How come you didn't go into the house with Sam?"

"I want Poland out *here*, Tish. I want him on a one-and-one basis—not where I have to worry about who might be moving in behind me."

"He will come out here at this hour of the morning because Sam shows up at his door and asks him to come outside? Crazy, man! That's his pad inside those walls. How come he has walls in the first place? You think of that?"

Shayne nodded. Sam can walk through those walls uninvited. I can't."

She lifted her arms and

waved her hands in exasperation. "Ohhh, you're beautiful, Shayne! You with a big gun on your chest and you send Sam to the lion. Just beautiful!"

She left the Buick, leaned through the open window. "I hope you don't mind if I sit at the cage door."

He watched her go through the early morning light to the walk gate. She grabbed the black iron and stared inside. Then she sat down and crossed her legs under her. She sat very straight and still, peering into the mansion grounds.

XII

SHAYNE WAITED FIVE MINUTES. The girl hadn't stirred. He lit a cigaret, left the Buick, went up on the sidewalk, paced, but remained behind the wall. Sam could have gone over to Poland's side by now—or Sam could be in big trouble.

"Anything?" he asked once.

Tish Smith snapped, "Nothing."

Then she stiffened. Shayne flipped the cigaret into the street, watched her. He said nothing. She stood up. "Sam, Mr. Poland and another man—they're getting into a heap. Mr. Poland is carrying some kind of case, a suitcase, I think. He's getting into the back seat. The other man is waving Sam around to the driver's side. Sam is going to drive."

She came down the sidewalk to the Buick on a run. Shayne was already inside with the car, motor purring. She plopped beside him. "What does it mean?"

"I'm not sure," he growled. "Sam was to tell him I was waiting out here."

"Well, he wouldn't get into a car just to come out—"

She cut off the words as the long black sedan slid out of the grounds and turned down the street away from the Buick. Sam Goldtree was at the wheel. He shot a look toward the Buick before making the turn. He looked frightened. But the black sedan eased along at a steady thirty to thirty-five miles per hour, the occupants seemingly unconcerned about a Buick that was trailing.

"What's going on?" Tish Smith asked once. She was tense.

"Poland knows we're back here," said Shayne, "and they're not trying to dump us. So maybe he has another meet site in mind."

"It isn't that at all, Mr. Shayne," she said. "And you know it!"

She was silent. He welcomed the quiet. He could think without interruption. But no matter how he sliced Poland's possible

motives for this trip through the city's early morning sun, he came up at a dead end.

He settled back in the Buick seat, cruised along behind the sedan. Poland had taken the play. The detective was riding, waiting. They rolled steadily—it was still too early for the onslaught of heavy morning traffic. They entered the area of public marinas and private boat clubs and Shayne considered a new prospect.

Suddenly the black sedan turned into a private boat club. It stopped at a gate. A man came out, looked inside the sedan, waved and opened the gate. The gate shut off the Buick. The man bent politely at the open window. "Yes, sir?"

Shayne flashed his ticket. The gatekeeper studied it, frowned. "A private detective?"

"I'm with the people in the black sedan."

"Mr. Poland?" The gatekeeper frowned. "I don't think so, sir. Mr. Poland would have told me. I'm sorry, but I can not allow you beyond this point. This is a private club, sir."

Beside Shayne, Tish Smith said, "Mr. Poland has a boat. Sam often operates it for him."

"A seaworthy boat?" Shayne snapped.

She shrugged. "Sam has taken him to Nassau."

Shayne got out of the Buick, towered over the gatekeeper.

"Need a phone," said the detective.

The gatekeeper pointed to a public phone booth.

Chris Sadler had learned and perfected his skill in Korea, later had turned out an unknown number of copter jockies for the Vietnam fracas. He was now totally gray and teaching young business executives how to lift off, sit down and get between the helipads—for a healthy fee.

He was also happily married to a young woman who kept a bottle of Martell stashed far back in the kitchen cupboard. Chris Sadler and his wife were soda-pop people, but they occasionally had a visit from a Martell man.

Chris Sadler's secret longing these relatively calm days was for an occasional confrontation that presented an element of danger and excitement. Chris Sadler had been reared in war, had been a teacher in war. He missed war.

Thirty-five minutes later, he put the shiny blue copter down on the helipad two miles from the boat club and offered white helmets as Shayne put Tish Smith inside the bubble and followed her.

They lifted gently and Chris Sadler smiled at Shayne.

"Point, Mike."

"Tish?" said the detective.

"South," she said. "There's a key. I think Mr. Poland owns it. All I know is Sam has taken him there."

"How far?" asked Sadler.

"Two hours by boat."

Mike Shayne was studying the water. "Not much down there, Chris—fishermen. Poland will be moving fast."

"Like that dude ahead?"

Shayne peered hard. "I don't see anything."

"The wake—down ahead there. That boy is tracking."

He finally caught up but kept the boat to the copter's right. "What do you think?"

Tish Smith said, "It could be—it looks like . . ."

Shayne said, "Swing over him, Chris."

They dipped in and made a pass above the boat. One man appeared on deck. He came out of a cabin entry and lifted his arm. Shayne heard the snap of a slug tearing through the helicopter.

"Ahh—funsville!" Sadler breathed.

Tish Smith looked grim. "That was Maxwell Poland."

Shayne frowned in thought. Poland playing trigger man? Where was his heavy, Hank Davis? "You figure Sam is piloting?" he asked the girl.

She nodded.

"I want to take another look, Chris," said the detective.

Sadler swung in behind the boat for the approach. Only the one figure remained on the deck.

XIII

MIKE SHAYNE TOOK THE .45 from its rig, shoved the door of the copter open. "Let's go."

Sadler put the copter through a series of intricate maneuvers. Each move gained on the boat until they were again over it.

The lone figure remained on deck, attempting to catch up with the dodging of the copter. No one else appeared.

Two slugs whined past Shayne as he leaned from the copter door. He triggered a shot into the boat deck, saw Poland leap backward. Shayne fired again. Poland leaped aside and then disappeared into the cabin entry. Shayne waved Sadler off and they dipped away.

The detective turned to Tish Smith. "You sure another man was with Sam and Poland when they left the house?"

"Yes." She nodded.

Sadler asked crisply, "What's the pitch, Mike?"

"There should be a trigger boy—but there isn't."

"Maybe he's the sniper type, just waiting."

"Un-huh," said the redhead. "And maybe he's no longer aboard."

Sadler gave him an oblique glance. Shayne said, "A heavy goes over the side. A tie to murder gone. I have to get aboard that boat, Chris."

Sadler said, "There's a lifeline, but—"

Shayne interrupted, "There's a kid down there piloting the craft. He's steering with two feet in his grave."

"Okay, Mike," said Sadler. Most of this is Greek to me."

"We stay out of range until I'm dangling," said Shayne.

"You'll be one helluva big target, Mike."

"Poland's no expert with a gun, Chris. He's already had three shots at us and missed twice."

"Mr. Shayne," Tish Smith gasped. "You're *crazy*!"

"You want Sam fed to the sharks?"

Shayne got into the lifeline harness.

Sadler said grimly, "I'll be swinging you, Mike. When you hit the deck, it will be with the direction of the boat. You're gonna hit smack into that mid-structure."

"I've smacked concrete walls and lived, Chris," the redhead said. "Get me down there."

But as he dangled from the lifeline, as he was swooped across the rolling water, swaying right and left in a rhythmic movement—he felt as if all the hostile eyes and guns of his days were trained on him.

His fingers worked against the grip and trigger guard of the .45 in his right hand and he kept his eyes trained on the boot deck.

Shayne watched for the appearance of Hank Davis. If Davis popped into view, it could well be the bloody end.

Suddenly he was swung sharply to his right, dipped almost to the water level. The sea smacked his feet briefly and put him into a spin.

Then he was righted again and had the boat in sight. It was slightly to his right. Poland moved out from the cabin door. Shayne fired a shot. Poland dived out of sight.

Then Chris Sadler made his move. Shayne was carried behind the boat, then forward. The stern seemed to come at him fast—much too high. Poland appeared again. Shayne fired another shot, saw Poland go up on his toes and twirl.

Then his quarry fell out of sight and the only thing the detective could see was the rear of the boat. It loomed until he was inches from being smashed against it—then he was lifted suddenly, then lowered to the

polished wood.

Poland lay sprawled on the deck. His left arm was extended toward a gun just inches from his hand. Shayne fired a shot into the wood. Poland pulled his hand back.

Mike Shayne got out of the harness and ran to Poland. He dropped a knee on Poland's chest and pushed the muzzle of the .45 under the man's jawline.

The boat suddenly went dead in the water and an ashen Sam Goldtree appeared in the wheelhouse entry. He sagged.

"My *God*!" It was all he could say.

"Where's Davis?" Shayne yelled.

"Maxwell . . . shot him . . . pushed him over the side . . . way back there."

"You were next, Sam."

"I know. I figured as soon as we got to the key . . ."

The boy went silent.

Shayne looked up at the chugging helicopter hanging over them. He was briefly surprised, and then he grinned.

Tish Smith had extremely fine looking legs. Chris Sadler lowered her to the deck of the boat. Shayne helped her out of the harness.

Free, she stood for a moment, her head slightly cocked, her pale blue eyes studying his rugged contours. The a tiny smile tweaked the corners of her unpainted lips.

"Hey, man!" she breathed. "You are Mr. Super!"

She popped a kiss against his mouth, then dashed around him, went up the short ladder to the wheelhouse, where she curled herself against and around Sam Goldtree.

Shayne put Maxwell Poland in the lifeline harness. Chris Sadler lifted him into the copter, lowered the rope again. The redhead climbed into the harness, then looked up at Sam Goldtree and Tish Smith.

"When do we have to be back?" Tish Smith asked.

"Take a year," he said.

She smiled. "Today will be adequate. It's Sam's day off, and"—"I think this is going to be a fine day."

Next Month's Dual Headlines:

•

A CONTOUR FOR KILLING by BRETT HALLIDAY

The New Mike Shayne Short Novel

•

TICKET TO HARPERVILLE by JERRY JACOBSON

A New Short Novel of Tremendous Suspense

Live By The Sword

by MELANIE DuLAC

It was Liz and Larry's first anniversary—as night patrol car partners. As if a blizzard was not enough trouble, a major gang rumble erupted.

LIZ GLANCED AT THE rugged monolith of a man sitting behind the wheel. In the stygian darkness of the car, his black, curly hair and dark eyebrows were barely visible. Two features marred his long, chiseled face—a nose that had met more than its share of obstructions and a dimple on his cheek caused by an intoxicated buxom blonde wielding a fingernail file. Fourtyish, he had a powerfully, athletic physique.

"Our first anniversary, and they said it wouldn't last." He grinned.

"I guess we both had our doubts, too, including your wife, Larry."

A mechanical voice blared over the radio, "Baker 17, a 2910 with gun at 311 Dudley Avenue, handle Code 1."

Then it fell silent.

She surveyed the slushy, snowy streets. The cold had driven people inside, leaving only a few in doorways or carefully picking their way along the sidewalks. "I wonder what they're planning at the station?"

"I don't know. I expected something before we came on patrol."

"If there's a cake that says 'Larry loves Liz' I'm going to flatten a few tires."

"Norma wouldn't be thrilled either."

She tightened the rubber band that secured her long chocolate-colored hair. There was a question on her mind that she had wanted to ask since their first day together, but she knew they needed time to adjust to one another. "How did you feel about us . . . me?"

"I didn't think you stood a prayer. You're so small and—idealistic." He uttered the last word with distaste.

"That dimmed after about a week on the job, but haven't you gone a little to the other extreme . . . cynical?"

"Well, Liz, I'll tell you. Try having your partner of twleve years gunned down in the parking lot just after we'd finished our shift by a guy that just didn't like pigs. That did wonders for my outlook."

"If you don't mind, I'll pass. I'd like to keep you around." Liz watched him for a moment. "Well, do I have the makings of a good cop?"

"You're starting to swing a mean nightstick, but when you lose it . . ." Larry shrugged.

"Are you talking about last night? We might have knocked a few pieces of furniture around, but I hung onto him."

"If you two had waltzed around any longer, you'd have had to announce your engagement." Glancing over, he asked seriously. "How do you feel?"

"Just a little sore." She shook her head. "We really had a bear hug on each other." Liz rolled down her window. Larry wasn't going to answer her seriously. His years on the force had made him cautious. She'd have to take comfort in the fact that he expressed no strong criticism.

"It's cold, probably'll go below zero," she added.

"Let's see how good a teacher I am. What kind of crime tonight?"

Liz closed her window. "The one thing you expect is the unexpected, but there shouldn't be much. There'll be a lot of accidents. People will stay inside. Those who are hungry, cold or homeless might get angry and desperate. Because they're scared, there could be a lot of spur-of-the-moment crimes—amateur night."

"Very good, Rookie," Larry said proudly.

"Do you really think the Aces and the Mavericks will go at it in this weather?"

Larry shrugged. "The Sarge heard it through the Becker Street grapevine."

Liz leaned back. "Why don't Kingman and Ossini fight this

out personally instead of involving their gangs in these senseless wars? Other gangs do good work for their neighborhoods, but these two . . ." her voice trailed off.

"We don't have to figure them out, just stop them." He peered out at the treacherous streets. "Penny's is still open. Let's eat. After three calls in two hours, I'm bored to hunger."

Liz radioed in. "Baker 9 requesting Code 7 at Penny's."

"Roger, Baker 9."

After parking the car, they stepped out and were met by a blast of cold wet wind. They jammed on their hats and their gloved fingers fumbled with the brass buttons on their blue tunics.

Not wishing to spend the rest of the shift in wet feet, Liz carefully threaded her way through the mountains of grayish snow that during the day had been melting into icy moats. Now in the freezing night air, they were covered by a thin, deceiving layer of ice, thick enough to hide the water but too thin to hold any weight. The wind whipped in off the harbor. A nor'easter was brewing.

Stepping onto the sidewalk, she listened. Most of the traffic was plows and sandtrucks, trying to get rid of the present snow before the next came. All sounds were muted—and the citizens seemed to be operating as a skeleton crew, sending out token pedestrians.

Liz had grown up in a small town and decided that the main difference between a city and a town when a storm occurred was that, although people went inside in both places, it made a city appear dead, while a town seemed to be comfortably waiting it out.

They entered the small bright restaurant and bumped into two other officers exiting. "Well, Beauty and the Beast—loafing, too?" One of them, a red-haired man asked goodnaturedly.

"All the time, Frank," Larry replied.

"On a night like this, I'd just as soon stay in the cruiser," his partner stated. "Luckily, it's not supposed to get bad till after midnight. By then, we'll all be snuggled down with our wives." He rubbed his newly-grown, blonde moustache. "Who are you going home to, Liz?"

Larry spoke before she could. "To a crummy hotel room."

"You ought to know, Larry," Frank said.

"Hold it," Liz cut in, "or I'll let the whole force know your first name is Francis."

"How—" Frank began, but his partner interrupted.

"Franics? You never told me."

"Let's go, Dick." Frank said quickly.

Dick followed him out the door. "Whatever you say, Francis." Frank's remark was lost in the wind.

They hung up their hats and winter coats and sat at the counter. "Beast!" Larry said in mock disgust. "That's as bad as when they called us May-December."

Liz smiled. "They're always thinking." She looked up at the stocky sixtyish man who approached them.

"Officers Farrell and Colson, I haven't seen much of you lately." He was all smiles.

"Ben, we couldn't resist you any longer, so we demanded to be put back on patrol in this area." Liz smiled and leaned towards him.

His laughter filled the small restaurant. "You tell a pretty story. Make a man feel good." With his apron, he mopped the sweat from his bald head and moved towards her. They met midway over the counter. "I've been saving a roast beef dinner specially for you two."

Liz feigned indignation. "I hope you haven't saved it too long. It won't be in very good shape."

Ben roared again and went into the kitchen.

Larry ran his fingers through his hair. "He's right. You could talk the fish right out of the pond."

"It's better than knocking heads." Liz's hazel-brown eyes widened. "Hey, you owe me a quarter for that family dispute this afternoon. It was the husband's fault. I'm ahead $3.75 to $2.00. Talking can be very profitable."

"Just lucky. We'll start finding wives wrong soon." He sighed and brought a quarter out of his pocket. "I'm just waiting for the day you really lose your cool. Then we'll see if you want to break someone in half or if all the books and poetry you read are enough."

"I can't fight as well as a man, so if I can save myself a trip to the hospital by talking, I will."

"I'm not questioning that. I'm amazed at how you get information from people—family disputes, rape victims, runaways. You talked that guy in off the ledge last month. A woman is better at that than a man. But when someone shoves you, my first reaction is 'he's shoving a woman,' not 'he's shoving a cop.' And I think I'll always feel that way."

He stared intently at her. "For a partnership to work, you've got to know each other inside out and up and down.

Then all it takes is a nod, a glance, a slight movement to know what you're going to do. It's like being married without the kids and money hassles.

"You're so even-tempered, never riled or mad," he went on. "Oh, you get upset, sometimes even cry, but I'm waiting for you to really blow. I've got to know how you're going to react. Understand?"

She nodded ruefully.

He was quiet for several moments them smiled at her. "Till then *you* keep on talking and *I* do the fighting."

Liz smiled too. "I can hear the guys at the station now—'the orator and the pugilist'."

Drumming his fingers on the counter, Larry searched for another subject. "You haven't told me what you're reading lately. Let's get it over with."

Liz knew that, as much as he complained about her reading, he looked forward to her critiques. It was hard for him to let people know that beneath his hard veneer there was a soft spot which craved beauty and knowledge.

"I'm reading Cervantes' *Don Quixote,*" she told him.

"He say anything good?"

"He said, 'Marriage is a noose'."

"No kidding? I'll have to get ahold of that one."

Ben bustled out with two steaming plates and placed them in front of them. "Everyone should have hot food on a night like this." His voice dropped to a whisper. "Look at that little guy over there. He's only having a milkshake."

A black boy about ten or twelve sat in a booth, reading a newspaper and sipping a strawberry shake.

"It's probably his supper," Larry said indifferently and returned to his meal.

"That's Marc Davis," Liz told him. "He works at that newsstand on Park Street."

"Why isn't he home?" Ben asked.

"Any number of reasons—just choose one or two," Larry replied.

"This is great," Liz said hoping to cheer Ben up, and he did smile. "Just like a home-cooked meal."

"When are you going to move out of that place and start cooking your own meals?" Larry asked as Ben moved to the front window to check on the thickening blizzard.

"I told you—as soon as I find my ideal place I'll get out of this city and join you in suburban life. Until then a hotel room is fine."

"You really expect to find the perfect place? Lord—*idealists!*" He snorted.

"You could use some of it.

How does Norma put up with you?" she countered.

"When I'm with her and my kids, I'm a different man. I've got my garden and workshop and I'm very content."

"Content because it's your ideal place?" Liz raised her eyebrow.

"Damn!" He put down his fork. "I walked right into that one. Hey, Ben, how about putting the hockey game on that tube of yours?"

"You're not going to answer me?"

"No," Larry flatly replied and resumed eating.

They spent the rest of their forty-five minute dinner break screaming at the set between bites of food.

Finally, Larry rose. "Well, we've got to get back on the street. Man, this night's dragging."

They paid their bills and put on their coats and hats. Standing in the doorway, they watched the snowflakes being blown about by the blustery wind. Each hoped the other would take the initiative and open the door.

But a third party decided for them. "All units, all frequencies, a 214 with shots fired at the alley beside 1110 Preston Street. Handle Code 2." The message came blaring out of the portable radio they each carried clipped to their belts.

"It didn't take those gangs long," Larry said.

They raced to the car. Slush splashed over their shoes and slacks. Settling into the relative warmth of the black-and-white, Larry started the engine, while Liz radioed back, "Baker 9 responding to the 214, ETA 1 minute."

In a short while, the cruiser threw up a wave of water as it screeched to a halt. Liz unlocked the shotgun and met Larry in front of the car.

Because of the storm, the area was darker than usual. The upper stories of the buildings were obliterated by the swirling whiteness. A couple of streetlamps played eerily over the scene.

The pelting snow made it difficult to look straight ahead for any length of time. Police units were parked at crazy angles on the street. Blue uniforms swarmed into the alley and down the sidewalks after fleeing figures.

Directly before them, there was a flash of light followed by a gunshot that was muffled in the storm. A body fell into a snowpile along the right wall of the alley.

Racing into the alley, Larry yelled, "Give me the boomer and stay with him."

Tossing him the shotgun, Liz

watched him disappear around a corner into a confusion of unrecognizable shouts and shots from guns of varied calibers.

A blond-haired boy lay on his side, shivering and panting. His legs were in a slushy puddle at the base of the snowpile. As Liz bent down and rolled him onto his back, he protested feebly, "No, please—it hurts."

"I'm going to help you," Liz said gently. She easily took the knife he unconsciously clutched in his hand. "I'll be right back."

She ran to their car and radioed for ambulances, then returned with a blanket and medical kit from the trunk.

He was young. She doubted he'd ever shaved. The normal pinkish skin was rapidly turning gray, and his blue eyes were foggy with pain and tears. The cold air left his hands chapped, scaly and rough. He grasped his jacket, trying to stop the flow of blood and pain from his side.

Liz removed her gloves then brought the blanket up to his waist. Gingerly, she pulled his hands away to see the wound. A cursory examination showed that it wouldn't matter when the ambulance arrived. The snowbank he lay on fitted his contours comfortably. Now, it was going to serve as his death bed.

Tears and frustration

mounted up inside of her. She had wanted to be a cop. The eight-and-a-half-hour shifts, two days on and two days off, the day, night and graveyard watches she accepted.

Even as the action unfolded Liz subconsciously considered police routine. The boredom of monotonous days fixing street signs, handling noise complaints and false alarms, checking stores to make sure they were locked.

At the other extreme—exhaustion after a tour but staying out to check sources who might have information, then coming back to the station and finding her name on the extra detail list. The endless reports, finding the only way to unwind was by rapping with fellow officers after work.

Spending a day off in court and seeing more acquittals than convictions. Going from there to school, where she was studying for a baccalaurreate

degree in law enforcement so she could do her job better.

Discovering that all the jujitsu, alkido and savate were not enough to stop a gorilla from breaking her ribs with a baseball bat, or two guys from mopping up a barroom with her head.

She was learning a lot. Friday was payday, and the first of the month was welfare checks and the most dangerous calls, were family disputes—the husband shooting up the house, the wife resenting interference and smashing a plate over her head—and traffic citations—"the guy was speeding because he just robbed a store."

Liz accepted all that. It was offset by the good they did—finding a lost child, stopping a crime before anyone was hurt, preventing someone from making a fatal mistake, helping the lost find their way, comforting the frightened, delivering babies—now and then saving a life.

Looking at the boy in the snow, Liz remembered the times they were too late. They had found dead bodies and some they had sent to the hospital died. But this was the first time she had watched someone die.

What a waste! she thought. Helpless, she searched for words. Liz reached for his hands. Although his blood was warm, they were numb and cold. "You should have gloves on on a night like this," she said gently, then realized the stupidity of her statement.

If he noticed, he didn't mention it. "I'm—I'm always forgetting them."

"What's your name?"

"Carl Ludlow."

"Take it easy, Carl. The ambulance is coming."

He closed his eyes. Doctors have an expression, "Death has set in." She could see it, and evidently Nature told him. Suddenly, Carl opened his eyes and panic jumped into them. "Oh, my God, am I going to die?" He searched wildy around before settling on her. Pulling a hand free, he grabbed her shoulder. "*Am* I?"

Lie, Liz told herself as she looked deeply into his eyes. No, a man's got a right to know. Birth and death are the only events that belong to each person exclusively.

"Yes," she told him.

She could see that he wanted to run, but the strength wasn't there. "Sweet Jesus, I don't want to," he cried. "Tell me how to die. I'm scared!" Carl's voice dropped to a plaintive whisper.

Liz released his hand from her shoulder and placed it back on his chest. Wrapping her

hands around his, she desperately searched her memory.

All the poems and books she had read were just so many words. *Think of something.* She badgered herself mentally for what seemed an eternity before a thought entered her head. She sat beside him to contribute her body warmth to his.

"Last year, my uncle died," Liz began softly. "I half-listened to the minister's eulogy until he mentioned something. He said man fears death because he doesn't know what's beyond life. Yet, if you asked a baby if he wanted to be born, he'd say no, because he'd be scared not knowing what was beyond birth. Maybe what's after death is even better than what's after birth."

It was hailing now. The minute pieces of ice were like rock salt, and the noise they made bouncing off obstacles was like a swarm of locusts. It was falling so heavily that it almost looked as if nothing was coming down.

Her back was to the wind so she could shelter him. The precipitation blew down her neck and her dampened hair clung limply to her face. A thin veneer of ice covered everything quickly.

Carl's eyes were dull. His radial pulse was gone. Leaning over him, Liz placed her ear on his chest, covering her other ear with her hand. There was a weak apical count. His death was very close. She sat up again. Had what she said meant anything, been any help to him?

Carl was quiet, but when she moved he spoke. "I never thought much of life, even thought of suicide a few times. Now I want to live, and it's too late." His voice grew stronger as he added bitterly, "And no one cares."

"*I* care."

"*Why?* Why *should* you?" he asked desperately seeking some purpose to his death, some reason for ever having lived.

Liz wanted to comfort him. Stupid as it sounded, she hated the despair on his face. She wished he'd close his eyes and go to sleep. "During our lives we brush other people and leave our mark, whether it's good or bad, before moving on. We've just brushed each other, and I *do* care about you. It matters very much to me. You're not alone."

Fear, anger, resignation—Carl had run the gamut of emotions. There was nothing left to say. His face was tearstained, and his eyes were open. He refused to close them on the world until it was out of his control.

Liz remembered her police

training and asked, "Carl, who shot you?"

He focused on her. "I don't know." He thought for a moment. "I thought we had a good reason for fighting, but now . . . I didn't even know the guy who shot me, just a black guy in a plaid jacket. I thought I hated him, but how could I hate someone I didn't know? How could he hate me? What a stupid thing to die for!" He fell silent again.

It was agonizing, feeling this helpless, she thought. He grabbed her hands. Two tears rolled down his cheeks. He gave an anguished cry, "Oh, *Mom!*" With a last convulsive throe Carl died.

Something about his death brought back memories. A neighbor's dog was hit by a car, and even before Liz crossed the street, she knew it was dead. It was like a vacuum, almost a visible aura around the still form, a smell that her senses detected. When they brought the dog through the back yard, the horse, the dogs, the cats, the ducks, the chickens, even the rabbits reacted. They smelled death.

Another time, a horse almost threw her as they rode by a cemetery. It wasn't until the wind shifted that he would continue.

This was the same thing. Her senses recognized death. For long moments she sat unmoving, then the air became filled with someone's presence as sound from the street was blocked.

Glancing over her shoulder, she saw Larry standing in the alley entrance. "It's a lousy job," she said morosely.

"Sometimes." He moved beside her.

"I wonder if I'll die any better." Liz brought the blanket over Carl's head. "You know I've read lots of quotes about death, but the only one I could remember I couldn't tell him. William James said, 'Every individual existence goes out in a lonely spasm of helpless agony.' I couldn't tell him that."

Larry kicked at the pieces of ice on the ground. "For sleep is good, but death is better still—the best is never to be born at all."

That was the first time she'd ever heard him quote anything. "Where'd you hear that?"

"Oh, I—ah—my daughter had a book open on her desk. I happened to see it. I think Heinrich Heine said it."

A smile warmed her inside though she was too emotional to have it reach her lips. Larry wouldn't admit that she was having an effect on him, that he had deliberately picked up that book.

"Are you going to cry?" he asked uncomfortably.

"No—not now." Liz knew how upset and flustered he got when she cried, so she kept it under strict control. "I can see why you don't encourage your boys to be cops."

He nodded, then said, "Hey get out of the water!"

Liz glanced down. She was sitting in a snowy puddle, completely unaware of it. "Of all the stupid . . . " she muttered and stood. Water dripped off her pants legs. She wrung out the excess. "I didn't even feel it."

"It happens. Did you send for the meat wagons? We need them."

"Yep, did you get everyone?"

Larry nodded. "The kids ran straight into a couple of units over on Eddington."

Voices grew louder in the darkness and footsteps approached them. Soon two officers appeared with two boys in custody. The tall skinny youth with a scraggly, black beard was Kingman, head of the Aces.

He stopped and looked at the blanket that was already painted with snow. The hail had stopped, and the snow returned with more ferocity. "Which one of you pigs wasted him?" Kingman snarled.

Liz exploded. Society in general had killed the boy, but this youth in particular was responsible, whether or not he pulled the actual trigger. She sprang across the short width of the alley. At the last moment, the officer holding him deliberately released his grip. With his wrists handcuffed behind him, he couldn't defend himself. She bowled him over into a snowbank. The other officers found things to occupy their eyes so they wouldn't see what might happen.

"A forty-five killed him, not a service revolver." She placed one knee on his chest. "A forty-five slug will go through a couple of walls and drop a woman tucking her kids into bed. That's the real crime—that you could hurt some innocent person.

"Seeing that you and Ossini don't have the guts to settle this personally, you're going to keep on creating tragedies like this." Liz pointed to Carl. "I hope you kill each other off. But if I even hear that some bystander stubbed a toe because of you crud, I'm coming after you. And I'll go through every law book I can find, even the blue laws, to find charges. It'll take me years just to fill them out, never mind the time you'll have to serve. Do you understand—Harold?" she queried derisively.

"Yeah—sure," Kingman spat distastefully.

Liz stomped back to Larry. The other cop picked Kingman out of the snow and, along with his partner, left with the prisoners.

"Loquacious, learned Liz lost her level-headedness." Larry smiled.

"Oh, you've been waiting for this," she said angrily.

"Yep."

Liz faced him. "Tell me what good my anger did."

"Absolutely nothing for Kingman, but it made you feel better."

Liz shook her head. "I don't know."

A big, ruddy cop entered the alley. A pot belly pushed against his uniform, and he puffed considerably. "This was the only one I was able to catch."

Larry grinned. "John, you're going to have to admit that retirement is near."

Liz glanced over half-interested and was surprised to see Marc. "What are you doing here? Did you hear our radio at Penny's and race over to warn someone?"

With the nerve of youth he replied defiantly, "Yeah."

John held up a knife. "He was carrying this."

Liz took the knife and studied it for several moments then grabbed Marc by the front of his jacket. "Come here!"

Marc, who wasn't handcuffed, didn't balk until she reached over and pulled back the blanket exposing Carl. Giving a cry, he tried to pull free, but she held him tight.

Picking Carl's knife out of the snow, Liz held it, along with Marc's knife, in front of him. " 'All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.' You want to end up like him?"

She allowed him to wiggle lose and race away. John protested but Larry stopped him by saying, "What do you know, maybe that did some good." Grumbling, John left the alley.

Larry returned to Liz as she surveyed the snow, which was already gray and spoiled. There was a small pool of darkened blood beside the body.

Words wouldn't form complete sentences in her mind. Violence—madness—Ugliness—the whole scene became too much.

She remembered how much she had enjoyed childhood winters in the country—sliding, skiing, skating, building snowmen, playing—everything so beautiful and invigorating and innocent.

"Larry, can I go home with you tonight? I've got to see some clean snow," she said.

"Sure," he replied gently. "Norma, can't resist getting you home-cooked meals." There was a long silence, and he realized she shouldn't stay by the body. "You all right, Elizabeth?"

Liz smiled. He knew how much she hated that name. "I'm fine, Lawrence. Do you really think I did Marc some good?"

"Yeah."

Taking her gloves out of the now, Liz looked back at Carl's hands. Pulling the blanket over his head, she said, "Too bad someone didn't say that to him about five years ago."

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DEATH IN THE PARLOR

Even though Mama Mia ran the most respectable parlor in town and Maria drowned in a water bed, it was murder—nor was Kowalski's problem eased with a city commissioner involved.

by PHILIP DONALD

KOWALSKI KNEW it was going to be one of those days as soon as he struggled out of bed. His head pulsated with the granddaddy of all hangovers. He'd spent last night at his brother's birthday party and rum flips over vodka collinses—plus God alone knew what else—had turned his mouth into cotton waste.

Walking on eggs, he made it to his cubby-hole kitchen and managed to force down a little Irish coffee. By the time his partner arrived to pick him up for the four p.m. to midnight shift, City Detective Barney Kowalski was still walking on eggs. But now they were hard-boiled.

Bolivar Cohen filled a cup half full of coffee, diluted it with water from the kitchen tap and added a hefty dollop of sugar. He had felt the bite of Kowalski's coffee before. "We gotta call already," he said. "Mama Mia's Massage and Pizza Parlor."

"Mama Mia's *what*?" Kowalski spoke through the T-shirt he was trying gingerly to slip over a head that seemed sizes too large.

"Massage and Pizza Parlor,"

Cohen replied patiently. "Murphy and Sikes—you know, those two rookies on your old beat—well, they called it in and said it's really weird. We got the nod and gotta get right over, so will you snap it up already? Some chick drowned. Sounds wild, but that's what they said."

By this time Kowalski was dressed and reaching for his hat. "Guess my old beat has changed some," was his only comment as they went out to the blue '72 Plymouth. It had aged quickly under the hands of many drivers, but the Department was on a tight budget.

Mama Mia's Massage and Pizza Parlor was located between a bank and a barber shop. Everything about the outside decor oozed discretion and near-anonymity. A sign proclaimed FREE PIZZA, and in smaller letters *with every massage*. In large print read ADULTS ONLY.

Another tastefully designed placard announced that this was *Where Executives Meet to Relax and to Eat*. The plate-glass windows were covered with drapes. Barney and Cohen nodded to the cop on the door and pushed their way in.

When their eyes adjusted to the dim light, they saw that they were in a reasonably spacious room furnished with several comfortable easy chairs, a large color TV and a long bar serving ten stools, three of which were occupied by lightly clad females who might have been pretty if they hadn't been looking so solemn.

Behind the bar were shelves holding a moderate assortment of liquor bottles, farther down were ingredients for pizza and a large pizza oven. Standing there, obviously in charge, was an Italian-looking lady who could have been pretty in her day, but was now rather more than pleasingly plump. Since Cohen was bigger than Barney, she addressed her opening tirade to him.

"We never had no trouble here before, officer—"

"*This* is Lieutenant Kowalski," Bolivar explained wearily, "I'm Sergeant Cohen."

"Oh!" she said, turning to Barney, who was peering at the drapery-hung walls, trying to spot the door he knew had to be there, "Well, I'm Rosa Margoli, but everybody calls me 'Mama'. Come, I show you where it happen. An' you put him in jail, that sumonabish who do this! We still got him here too!"

She walked around the end of the bar and pulled back the drapes to reveal a dimly lit hallway with several doors leading off on either side. In-

dian style, with Mama in the lead, they marched down it and entered a single open door.

Barney scanned the room with the educated eyes of a thirteen-year veteran of the police force. It was about ten by twelve feet. Puddles of water blotched the deep-pile carpeting. Although a bedside lamp was aiding the medical examiner, the conventional light source—black light—still caused an eerie glow to emanate from all white objects in the room—the shirts and teeth of the men, and the pallid nude body of the girl on the floor.

Huge psychedelic posters covered the walls except for that immediately to the right of the door, where various articles of clothing were hung on hooks. A large waterbed took up most of the room. In the weird lighting its sheet-covered surface seemed to undulate like water in a pool.

The pillows at its head were firm and unused. At its foot was a shelf and tub combination raised about three feet off the floor. The shelf held linens, towels, and lotions. The tub held foamy, sudsy water.

On the four carpeted steps leading up to the tub sat—or rather lolled—a grey-haired, vacant-eyed, florid-faced man. He looked well into his forties and was running to fat. His only clothing was a towel casually draped across his middle. Beside him stood a slim young policeman, trying to look blasé about the whole thing.

The medical examiner was kneeling next to the body. He looked up from his task, recognized Barney and said dryly, "She drowned."

"In a massage room?" Barney asked, eyebrows up.

The M.E. looked pained. "I can't help it, Lieutenant," he said, "Of course we'll do an autopsy, but I'm telling you she drowned! She hit her head and drowned!"

"In the tub?" asked Bolivar.

"No, in the waterbed—see?" The medical examiner indicated a sizable rent in the surfaces of both the sheet and the bed. "We had to pull her out of there. She was in up to her shoulders. Must be a pretty old bed—they're usually tougher than that."

Barney turned to the patrolman. "Which one are you, Murphy or Sikes?"

"Murphy, Lieutenant."

"Did this joker say anything yet?"

"Well, Lieutenant, he's pretty spaced out on something," said Murphy. "What I've pieced together is, they were both in the tub playing patty-cake or whatever and both of them must have been stoned to the gills,

because they decided they were kids playing in a wading pool.

"After a bit she said she didn't want to play in the wading pool no more and wanted to swim instead. She climbed up on that shelf and dove headfirst into the waterbed!"

"She *dove*. . . ?"

"Headfirst," Murphy repeated flatly, making an illustrative gesture with his right hand. "Right in!"

"How does that fit with what you found, Doc?" Barney asked the M.E.

"It's a pretty close fit. Some of her nails are broken and possibly even some fingers. The blow on her head could have occurred when she struck the platform supporting the waterbed. I'll have to confirm it at the lab, of course."

The M.E. was being professionally cautious. He added, "I can't speak for the girl, but that man is under the influence of some drug, apparently a hallucinogen, probably LSD."

"Well, that just about wraps up the case," Bolivar remarked. "Two hypes on a trip. One tripped and fell!"

Kowalski looked again at the bleary blob of humanity seated on the steps. His eyes narrowed, then widened.

"Wait a *minute*, Bo," he exclaimed. "I know this turkey! That's Ruby Klein, one of our esteemed city commissioners. Drugs, drinking, smoking and gambling are out where he's concerned and always have been. He's straight, I'll swear to that."

"How about women?" pointed out Bolivar.

"I said he was straight, not inhuman," countered Barney. "No, something's funny here. He's not one to get high on his own."

AT THIS POINT Mama, who had been listening, thrust her head in the door. "I'ma tella you there's somethin' funny. That girl there, shesa Marie, one–a nice girl. She don't use no drugs nor likker neither. If she did shesa no worka here! I fire junkies!"

A siren cut through her remarks. "That'll be the meat wagon, Mama," Barney said. "Could you show them how to get in here, please?"

In short order two attendants appeared with a stretcher and carted out the body under a sheet. They came back for Ruby Klein and led him out wrapped in a hospital blanket. Mama followed them down the hall, carrying Klein's clothing and muttering in Italian. Bolivar went to see the ambulance off and the M.E. departed, too, his work done.

Barney sighed, closed the

door and perched on the steps to the tub discovering, too late, that his chosen seat was sopping wet. He quickly stood up. "Okay, Murph," he said. "Let's hear it all from the beginning."

"Yessir," said Murphy. He conscientiously pulled out his notebook and consulted it.

"Officer Sikes and me was just comin' to the end of our shift when we got this 'see the woman' call and came here. We entered the premises at 3:35 p.m. and was told that the girl and her Jo—uh, client—had been overlong in the room and that they'd busted in the door"—he indicated a hook-and-eye hanging limply—"and found her dead and him in the tub cryin' like a baby.

"They swore they didn't touch nothin'. Didn't even try to get her out of the bed. Scared, I guess. Sikes and I went in and it was just like they said. She was stone-cold dead, so I left her lay 'till the M.E. came. I'm senior, so I sent Sikes to call for you and guard the door.

"I then proceeded to question Mr. Klein. I got his name outa his wallet. He was sittin' in the tub cryin' about how his girl had gone an' hit her head on the bottom of the pool. He just said that over and over, most of the time. Got the story out of him in bits and pieces until he just sorta petered out. I got him

outa the tub and put that towel around him just before the M.E. got here."

"Pretty good, Murphy," said Kowalski. "Do you know the name of the deceased?"

"Yessir," replied Murphy, "She's Maria Valentino. She's been workin' here about three months. I think she's some kind of relative of Mama's. Mama was all broken up about it. She wanted to kill Mr. Klein 'cause she thought he done it."

"How long have you had this beat, Murphy?" asked Barney.

"About a year, sir—and Sikes has sided me since four months ago."

"How long has this place been here?"

"About nine months. Before that it was just a pizza parlor and Mama ran that, too. Business was bad, so she added the gimmick."

Barney grinned, "I'll bet business has picked up some!"

"You better believe it, Lieutenant!" Murphy laughed.

"This place ever give you much trouble, Murph?"

"Naw—uh,—no, sir." "Just a couple of drunks now and then—always men. Mama don't allow the girls to drink nothin' but tea. Usually Mama has things well under control by the time we get here.

"She's some old gal," he concluded with clear admiration in his voice, "and I'm telling you, Lieutenant, she runs a straight place. A little foolin' around, maybe, but she ain't runnin' no cathouse here. She knows we'd close her flat!"

Barney nodded, thoughtfully. "Thanks, Murph, I'll remember that. I'm going to question Mama and the gals in the bar. You stick it out here until the Tech boys arrive. Bo has probably called 'em by now. You tell 'em I want material from the sheet and waterbed around that tear.

"I want 'em to check the platform for scratches—rip up the whole thing if they have to—and I want 'em to pay special attention to any prints they might find on that shelf, particularly if they are footprints."

"Yessir," replied Murphy.

"Then you and Sikes get back to the station and be damn sure to write up your reports before you knock off work! I don't go for these two-days-later routines!"

"Yessir," Murphy said, staring glumly into a paper-bedecked future. Barney left.

THE BIG ROOM had not changed. Mama was back of the bar leaning across and talking to the three girls, who still perched on their stools. She straightened up and they all looked at Barney as he entered. Bolivar Cohen chose that moment to come in the front door.

"Techs are on the way, Barney," said Cohen.

"Right," said Barney. He sat on a stool and turned to Mama. "Mama, suppose you introduce us to the girls."

Mama complied. "The one closest with the red hair, shesa Tina. The one inna middle issa Gloria. An' the one behind, shesa Cinnamon. Smile, girls!"

Very small, dutiful smiles

flicked on and off. Obviously the girls weren't too happy to be around the fuzz.

"Those aren't their real names, are they?" asked Bolivar, who had remained standing in the center of the room.

Barney waved him quiet. "Those are their business names. We'll worry about their real names later if we need 'em." He turned to the girls with his most winning smile and asked, "Now, did any of you see the john who was with Maria?"

Tina answered. "Me and Gloria was in here with Mama and Jody—that was Maria's business name—when he came in. Cinnamon had a client, but she came in later while they were havin' their pizza."

Gloria nodded her agreement. "I think he had a thing for Jody. He's been here before. Always seemed like a nice, quiet kind of guy, not the type of dude to try an acid trip at all."

"About what time did he come in?" Barney asked.

"Between one and one-thirty, I think," replied Tina. "Isn't that right, Mama? You'd just come back from your trip to the dentist when he walked in."

"Thatsa right," Mama said. "Ima wait two months for that appointment and it had to be at noon when things is busy, but what you gonna do? I go and he drill a little and charge a lot. I get back here sometime after one and that fella he shows up about five minutes later."

"Okay," said Barney, "What happened then?"

"Nothin'. He say he want pizza an' Maria to wash an' massage him. So hokay, we feed him pizza an' espresso too. They eat an' talk an' look at TV a little. Then they go in back."

"What time was that?"

"Maybe two, maybe little after. At three-thirty or little before we wonder what's keepin' 'em. Can't hear nothin' in here 'cause of the drapes and we was all in here 'cause there wasn't no more business. We go to the room an' hear *him* makin' funny sounds an' splashing, but not her. We busta in the door an' you know the rest." Mama spread her hands.

"They had pizza and espresso . . . How did they drink their espresso?" asked Barney.

"With the hands . . . Oh, you mean . . . They both took cream an' sugar." Mama was a bit disdainful. "Bad thing to do to good espresso. Only way is drink it black. We got good espresso. You want some, Lieutenant?"

"No thanks," said Barney. Cohen looked disappointed. "Is

that your only sugar bowl, Mama?"

"Yes. Inna little place like this we only need only one sugar bowl."

"Bo,"—Barney looked very serious,—"take your handkerchief and pick that bowl up *very* carefully. I don't want any smudged prints or spilled sugar. Take it out to Sikes and have him run it right down to the lab. I want prints and I want those sugar cubes tested for LSD."

The light dawned for Bolivar. "Of course, it had to be in the sugar, didn't it? That's how you take LSD, on sugar cubes! Why didn't I think of that? Hey, no wonder you didn't want any espresso. Ya knew we both take sugar!"

"Get on with it, Bo!"

"Right, Barney." Bolivar left, gingerly cradling the bowl in his handkerchief.

Barney turned back to the women. "That leaves us with a big question. If there is LSD in that bowl—and I think there is—how did it get there?"

This brought on a loud chorus of denials.

Barney held up his hand for silence. "Look, I'm willing to accept the probability for now that it wasn't one of you. You can help things out by trying to remember who could have got to that sugar bowl today."

"Why today?" asked Cinnamon.

"Because if it had been here any time at all, you'd have noticed it. You use sugar don't you? Hell, it probably hasn't been in there more than a few hours!"

Mama looked horrified. "Thatsa right! We coulda all been travelin'!"

"Tripping, Mama."

"Thatsa what I mean. Tripping. I use the sugar in tea I make sometimes. Why woulda somebody do thisa thing? They think it big joke? I get holda them I maka big joke with their head. Right here!" She banged her meaty fist on the solid counter-top.

"Don't worry, Mama," Barney soothed. "We'll catch whoever did it. And if there is any head-knocking to be done, we'll do it. Now, who came in here today?"

Mama grew thoughtful. "Well, we open at ten inna morning. No business at first. Then about 11:30 we start to getta the what I call 'food and feelie' crowd. Nobody stay very long. Everybody gotta get back to jobs.

"But"—She consulted a ledger under the counter—"We were busy all right. We had nine people between 11:30 and one o'clock. Then nobody 'till that fella come to see Maria."

"Did they all have pizza and espresso?"

"I don't know for all. I was gone sometimes. Maybe Tina knows."

Tina shook her head. "I can't remember too well. I did the cooking while Mama was gone and I think most of them had espresso, but I can't remember whether they used the sugar or not."

"God!" said Gloria. "There might be nine guys out there somewhere taking trips they hadn't planned!"

"Eight," said Barney, "if one of them is the one we're after."

"Yeah," replied Gloria, "But who else could it be? And why do it in the first place?"

Barney turned back to Mama. "Is there anybody who doesn't like you? Has anybody been after you to pay protection or something?"

Mama shook her head. "Nobody! Everybody loves Mama Margoli I think. At least I think so until today! Thosa two young cops pretty good fellas too. No hoods on this beat, you bet! I think some crazy man did it." She grinned. "You think maybe Cosa Nostra mad at me? This place, shesa too small to bring out mafiosi!"

Barney laughed. "No, Mama, but I had to ask."

Cinnamon broke in, "Couldn't one of the nine customers have

done it to get one of the other customers? An' Jody an' her john got it by mistake?"

"Yeah, sure," mused Barney, "that's possible. It is also possible that somebody doesn't like Rube Klein!"

At this point Bolivar returned. Four men followed him in carrying black bags. Barney showed them the door to the hall and pointed out the room, repeating what he had told Murphy. They trooped into the room and Barney called Murphy out and put him on the front door. Barney returned to his stool and this time Bolivar climbed up beside him. He was about to resume his questioning when one of the Techs reappeared.

"What'll we do about the water?" he asked.

"What water?" said Barney?

"Yeah, we can't rip out part of the platform without we get water all over everything."

Mama whooped and started for the hall. "What you gonna do? You gotta rùin my place?"

Barney grabbed her. "Calm down, Mama. We'll do as little damage as possible. Is there any way we can empty that bed?"

She quieted. "Sure. I worry about that water inna there. So every bed is connec' witha drain pipe. Behind the head thersa spigot. Just open it and water drains right out."

The Tech thanked her and returned to the room. Mama rounded on Barney. "Will the city pay for what they do?"

"I don't think so, Mama, but your insurance should cover it. Let's get back to business. Maybe you are right and it was a nut who did it, but somehow I don't think so. I think that there is at least one person who doesn't like you and wants to get you in trouble."

Mama threw up her hands. "But who? I'ma always try to be nice to ever'one!"

"Didn't you say a little while ago that you would fire anybody who used drugs? Has that ever happened?"

"Sure," said Mama, "Plenty times. Hard to get good girls for this job. Usually they leave quiet. They know my rules."

"Any trouble recently?"

"Mmh . . . yes, little bit. You girls remember? I caught that Angie smokin' pot. I fired her quick! She was plenty mad, but she went away an' I don' know what she does now. That was last Thursday. She only work here one week."

Barney looked interested. "Anybody else?"

"No. Fired two-three before her, but last was over a month ago—an' that wasn't for drugs. Wasa girl I caught givin' customer a little more attention than I want. We run a good place, here! I see to that! An' I don' think Angie do this. She never come back."

Cinnamon looked uncomfortable. Barney caught it and raised his eyebrows at her. "That's not so," she said. "I just remembered. She was back today during the noon hour while Mama was out. She said she came back for some stuff she forgot. I was alone up front and a client came in and I had to take him back 'cause he didn't want any pizza and was in a hurry. She was here, and she was alone in the room for at least a little while. She was gone when I came back."

Barney turned to the other girls. "Anybody else see her?"

A negative duet answered him.

Mama was shaking her head. "She say some mean things to me, but I don't think shesa gonna do somethin' like this! You think maybe it's her, Lieutenant?"

"It could be," said Barney. "We'll certainly check it out. Can you give me her name and address?"

Mama started fussing with papers under the counter. "Sure, got it here someplace. 'Angie', thatsa da business name . . . Funny—itsa not here. I know I had it right on top, but itsa not here now! That girl, shesa thief, too, maybe!"

"Do you remember what it said?" asked Barney.

"Lemme see," Mama screwed up her eyes, "Was one of those foreign names. Her first name was Jane, I remember that now. Last name? I can't remember. Only it was foreign."

"How about you girls?" Bolivar put in. "She tell you anything?"

Tina replied. "She said once she was Polish."

Mama's face brightened. "Thatsa it! Shesa Polack! Malin—Malinowski. Jane Malinowski! I knew it was one of them foreign names!"

Barney Kowalski winced. "Now, do you remember where she lives?" he prodded.

"Mmm . . . no. Sorry." Mama's expressive face mirrored real regret. "Never find her in this big city."

"I remember something, Lieutenant," Cinnamon piped up. "She used to hang out at the Tin Ear sometimes. That's a musician's dive over on Quincy Street. She had a thing about Dixieland."

Further questioning brought forth nothing more beyond a physical description. Jane Malinowski was about 5' 5", blonde, blue-eyed, with a heart-shaped face. Barney and Bolivar prepared to leave. Barney went first to speak to the Techs and then paused by Mama on his way out.

"You and the girls have been real cooperative, Mama. I appreciate it. When my crew leaves you can open for business again, but keep that room locked for a few days and don't use it or repair it. In fact, don't touch it until I tell you to, okay?"

Mama nodded.

"And another thing. You may not like this, but it has to be done. The Techs will take your fingerprints before they leave." He saw the shock on their faces. "Now look, I'm not going to hassle you. The prints are to solve this case . . . We gotta be able to tell the good guys from the bad guys. I'll personally see to their destruction as soon as the case is closed. Okay?"

He received grudging nods from all. On that note, the two detectives departed.

THEY CLIMBED INTO the car, Bolivar behind the wheel and Barney on the right. Bo looked at Barney.

"Did you mean what you said in there?" he asked.

"Mean what?"

"About tearing up their prints."

"Sure. Why not? As long as they didn't do it. If you really feel uptight about it, we can always photo-copy 'em first." Barney grinned at him, "But really—they helped us, you know. I believe in 'you rub my back, I'll rub yours'!"

"Okay, funny man." Bo grinned back. "I just hate to throw out good info, that's all. It goes against the grain. Where to now?"

"We get 'em to run an RI check on that name and description first. While they're doin' that we can get some supper. Call it in, will ya, Bo? Let's go to that little Greek place. Then we can check out the Tin Ear."

Forty-five minutes later they returned to their car from Papadapoulos' Bar and Grill. The evening was well established. Barney looked well-fed and satisfied. Bolivar looked a bit glum. "That stuff is good, but it always gives me heartburn," he complained, rubbing his diaphragm.

"So drink some chicken soup," countered Barney, as they drove towards the Tin Ear. "Besides, I thought heartburn was the natural condition of life for you fellas . . . Hey, Bo, stop at the next call-box, will you? I want to see what they've got on our girl."

Bolivar dutifully halted the car and Barney made his call. He returned. "She's got a short record—arrests for possession of pot, that sort of thing, nothing major. She spent a couple of months in the Women's Correctional Institution. They don't have a good address on her, though. That's not the bad news."

"So let's have it."

"The lab boys checked out that sugar-bowl. The top few cubes were loaded with LSD, just like we suspected. But the only prints on it belong to Mama, Tina and Klein. A couple of others that are believed to be old are too smudged to pick up. Our girl must have used an eye-dropper and never touched the bowl!"

Bo sighed. "Nothin' comes easy, does it. How are we going to pin it on her if we find her?"

"We'll jump off that bridge when we get to it," muttered Barney. "Let's go!"

The strains of a clarinet and trumpet blending perfectly with a Dixieland drum and cymbals floated down the street towards the two officers as they approached the Tin Ear. They parked the car, got out, and pushed through the Tiffany-glass decorated door and took in the nostalgic ambiance of the cozy little bar.

A girl fitting Angie's description was sitting at a round white-marble topped table chatting with a bearded, good-looking man in his early twenties. He was clutching a trombone loosely with his left hand. The two were giving each other such undivied attention that they didn't notice Barney and Bo enter. It was obvious that they were more than casual acquaintances.

"There's gotta be somethin' wrong," muttered Bo, "This is all too damn easy . . . "

They approached the table. Barney spoke, "Miss Malinowski?"

The blonde looked up. The expression on her face told them she knew they were fuzz. The boyfriend looked belligerent.

"Y-yeah," she said, nervously. "What do you want?"

"Could we speak to you privately, please?"

"Sure." She turned to her boyfriend. "Excuse me for a moment, honey. I gotta talk to the Man." As he made a heated move to rise and confront the two officers, she laid a restraining hand on his arm. "It's *all right*, hon. Probably just gotta get some friend outa a jam. I'll be back in a minute." He relaxed. She rose from her chair and joined the two policemen, leading them back out to the sidewalk.

"Listen, you studs. Dan is a great guy and he is looking out for me now. I don't want him to know about my past record just yet. I haven't done anything since they busted me last, so what do you want?" She chewed nervously at the side of her lip.

Barney looked at her thoughtfully. She wasn't reacting much like a person with something serious on her conscience.

"Miss Malinowski," he asked, "Did you go to Mama's today?"

She looked puzzled. "Sure, I went there about lunch-time to get a compact I'd loaned one of the girls. I walked in. She was busy, but I found it in her gear and left. What's the big deal? She claiming I stole my own compact?"

"No. We're investigating something else," said Barney. "May I look at your purse?" She handed it over. Barney pawed through it, looked at Bolivar and shook his head. Two lines

of irritation began to appear between Jane Malinowski's brows.

"Say, what is this anyway? What am I supposed to have done?"

"A girl died at the massage parlor today," said Barney. "A real bad acid trip . . . "

"God, not Cinnamon! I didn't like her much, but that's no way to go!" She appeared really shocked.

Barney's head jerked up from his perusal of her purse. "No, it wasn't Cinnamon. What made you think it was?"

"Because I know she drops acid. Never at the parlor, but I've seen her stoned before."

Barney and Bo exchanged glances.

"Why don't you like Cinnamon?" Bolivar asked.

"It's really more that *she* doesn't like *me*. We used to be friends. She hung out here, too. Both of us went for Dan in a big way, but I'm the one he settled on. She never forgave me for that. I think she's the one who told Mama I'd been smoking grass."

"Were you?"

"Sure, some a customer gave me. But I don't call that a drug."

"We all have our own opinions. You're welcome to yours," Barney said. "Thank you for your help, Miss. We'll be running along now."

"Hey, is that all? You just wanted to look at my purse? You don't want me to make a statement or something?"

"If we need a statement, we'll get in touch." Barney and Bo returned to their car.

Bo gripped Barney's arm. "How we going to find her again to get a statement? It was pure luck this time."

Barney grinned. Give me *some* credit. I got her address when I looked through her purse. Say, are you thinking what I'm thinking?"

Bo looked grim. "Yeah, we better get back to that massage parlor, fast!" He put on the siren as they pulled away from the curb. Barney grabbed the flasher and stuck it on the roof of the car.

THREE MINUTES after leaving the Tin Ear they stopped abruptly in front of Mama Mia's Massage and Pizza Parlor. As they entered the front door Barney noticed that business had picked up. The ten bar-stools were all filled with male cutomers. Mama was perspiring from the heat of the pizza oven and there were over two dozen glasses on the bar. Half of the glasses held varying quantities of beer or liquor, about a dozen were empty. It was obvious that Mama was short-handed.

Barney approached Mama

and said, "Mama, I know you're real busy, but we got to talk to Cinnamon."

Mama cleaned her hands on her red-and-white checkered apron. "Cinnamon, shesa busy just now. But thesa guys, they all happy—eat pizza, drinka some beer. Itsa gonna slow down now, I think."

"It is very important that we talk to Cinnamon *now*." Barney reiterated firmly.

Mama sighed. "Okay. You wait here." She dissolved into the darkness of the hallway.

She reappeared shortly with a very nervous Cinnamon. Seeing her standing for the first time, Barney automatically noted her down as about 5'3". Her brownish hair was in some disarray and even in the dim light her face seemed pale. She wore a crimson bathrobe belted tightly at the waist.

Before she could speak, Barney said, "Let's go outside, Cinnamon. Too many people in here. Bo, you get that item we need—you know what I mean—and come out when you have it." He took Cinnamon's arm and led her out the door. Mama started to speak, then threw up her hands in exasperation.

On the sidewalk, Barney turned to Cinnamon. "What's your real name, Cinnamon?"

"Belinda—Belinda Graves, Lieutenant," she said. "W-what's this all about?"

"Miss Graves, I must warn you that you are under arrest and that anything you say will be taken down in writing and may be used against you in a court of law. If you need a lawyer and don't have one, the court will appoint one. Do you understand your rights?"

Cinnamon stared at him dazedly.

"Do you understand your rights?" Barney repeated.

"Y-yes, but—"

"Belinda, you put the LSD on that sugar."

"You can't *prove* that!" She was suddenly defiant.

At this point Bolivar came out of the parlor, trailed by Mama. He was carrying a purse. Cinnamon screeched angrily. "*Hey*, gimme that! That's my property! You got no right . . ." Bo held it away from her clawing fingers.

"Is it there, Bo?" asked Barney.

"It's there," said Bo. He gave the purse to Barney.

Barney reached in and pulled out a small bottle stoppered with an eyedropper—the kind of bottle nose-drops come in. "What's this, Cinnamon?"

"My nose-drops. Use your eyes!"

"I'd rather use my nose," said Barney, taking out the stopper

and sniffing at the bottle, "It doesn't smell like nose-drops to me. I think it's LSD. It'll be easy enough to prove."

"Okay—okay, so I'm carrying some acid. So book me on possession!" Cinnamon spoke desperately. "That don't mean I had anything to do with that—that thing today!" Her eyes darted around like a trapped bird. "I *liked* Jody . . . and I didn't even *know* the guy with her!"

"Sure," said Barney gently, "we'll buy that. You weren't after *them*. It was Jane you wanted to get in trouble wasn't it? We know Dan threw you over for her. That's why you did it, isn't it, Cinnamon?"

His manner became more brisk as he saw the stubborn curl to his lip. "You might as well get the whole thing over with. Chemical analysis will show that the LSD in the bottle and the LSD in the sugar are identical."

Cinnamon stared at him wildly. Then she sagged like a pricked balloon. "All right . . ." she muttered, then louder, "All *right*! I did it. You're right! I did it to get Jane!" Then she wailed, "But I never thought anyone would die!"

"Take her to the car, Bo," said Barney. He turned to Mama as Bo and Cinnamon walked away. "Okay, Mama, you can go back to business now. We may need your testimony in court, though."

"What am I goin' to do with now two girls short an' I gotta go to court yet?" Mama shrugged. "Well, okay; I do it for Maria, who was my cousin's kid. Say, Lieutenant, could you really prove that stuff inna sugar an' inna bottle all the same?"

"I don't know, Mama," said Barney, "But *she* thought so and convicted herself in front of witnesses." After a few more words with her, he climbed into the car to ride to the station.

At midnight Bolivar drove Barney home.

"Hey, Barney," he said.

Barney jerked out of a semi-doze. "Yeah?"

"If that guy Klein thought his girl had bumped her head on the bottom of the pool, how come he didn't jump in and save her?"

Barney grinned. "They asked him that at the station house. It makes a nutty kind of sense."

"Whadda ya mean?"

"He can't swim!"

Malcolm was always breaking things—but never on purpose.

the cupcakes

by T. A. KEOHANE

MRS. EMMA WARD always carefully explained to strangers who first met her son, Malcolm, that he wasn't really retarded, just a bit slow, you understand. She would studiously avoid the surprised expression when they learned the strapping six-four Malcolm with bland brown cow-like eyes was actually twenty-five.

He looked about eighteen and acted far less. It was only when someone innocently offered a hand in greeting that Malcolm's adult strength became painfully evident. Malcolm was prone to giggles and delighted in the games of the neighborhood children. It was all Emma could do to get him past the community playground with its slides, and swings and see-saws. She was having such a problem now.

"Malcolm, do come along, there's no time for that," Emma said in irritation as he stopped

and pressed his face against the wire mesh fence. "And I don't see why you want to, anyway, when the children tease you so unmercifully."

"Oh, Mama, just for a little while. It's so much fun. The swings, and everything. And the kids love to have me push them, I'm so strong." His eyes begged.

Emma's lips tightened, and she felt a wave of near-hatred, a feeling much too evident lately, making her very nevous. Why had she been burdened with such a cross? A lone widow—little income. Only her social security and sale of home baked goods to the neighbors kept her from destitution. It didn't seem fair that she must cope with Malcolm, too. Not that he was ever mean to her, most of the time quite lovable, and she had complete control.

It was just the constant care. Of course there was nothing wrong with her son in spite of the whispers she suspected behind her back—a little slow, that was all. Good heaven, did they expect a genius? There were always some a bit behind. Her chin lifted proudly. Certainly there had never been anything of that sort in *her* family.

"I *said* no, and I *mean* no!"

It was almost a shout and Malcolm winced. He hated it when his mother yelled. It frightened him, made him feel lost and panicky. She was his only haven. For some reason no one seemed to love him but her. He couldn't see why this should be. He loved everybody, even the ones who made fun of him. It wasn't their fault if they didn't understand how the teasing made him feel bad. He forgave each and every one with all his heart.

Emma bit her lip when she saw Carrie Philbrick, her next door neighbor, come along just at that moment. It shamed and exasperated her to be caught shrieking like this at her son. Carrie had hinted more than once that Malcolm needed professional care—as though he were some kind of mental case. She should mind her own business being, after all, not a close friend, just a neighbor. Guilt made Emma more cordial than she intended to be.

"Oh, hello, Carrie, how nice to see you! Would you care to join me for a cup of tea?" She regretted the invitation at once. The last thing in the world she wanted was gossip with Carrie, who inevitable got around to the subject of Malcolm.

Her neighbor's interested glance took in Emma's flushed face, and Malcolm's quivering lips. "I'd be delighted, Emma, and I *do* hope you have some of

those delicious homemade cupcakes."

Malcom's ears pricked up at the word *cupcakes* and the playground was instantly forgotten.

"Good," he said. "I want a chocolate one. Two chocolate ones with a glass of milk. I promise not to drop the glass."

He grinned happily at Mrs. Philbrick. Somehow, he didn't think his mother liked her very much, but he did. She treated him like someone very special and talked slow and easy to him. He didn't see why that always made his mother mad.

It was the same way the teachers at school had addressed him. He tried not to remember how the kids talked. But no need to worry about that. In the seventh grade they told him he didn't have to come to school anymore, and he had been home a long time now with Mama. There were those cupcakes to think of. Malcolm smiled sunnily.

He helped his mother get the tea things ready, his tongue protruding a little in anxious concentration as his huge hands placed the fragile china cups on the tray. The pastries were dwarfed by his thick fingers as he put them down with careful precision. He licked a small dollop of frosting from a finger in relief when the job was done.

If people only knew how hard it was not to keep breaking things. He seemed to walk in a world of delicate objects just waiting for his assault. But that wasn't half as bad as his mother's shouted tirades afterward. And she never understood his utter sorrow and regret over his mistakes.

"Why, why do you do this to me?" she would moan. "Haven't I enough to bear?"

He would look at her in helpless bewilderment. *He* wasn't doing it to her—the *things* were doing it to him. And what was it she had to bear? It was all he could do not to cry—and sometimes he did, although it meant something else that must be terribly wrong. It really made her angry.

"Thank you, Malcolm," said Mrs. Philbrick in that slow, deliberate voice when he handed her the plate of cupcakes. "My, you did that just beautifully."

He basked in her praise but the strange look in his mother's eyes spoiled the glow. Why did it irk her when Mrs. Philbrick was so nice. Her growing anger confused him, made his movements awkward. His thick fingers got tangled up the way they always did, and the glass of milk he held seemed to jump right out of his hand. It landed on Mrs. Philbrick's lap with an awful splash, then shattered

upon the floor. She sprang to her feet shrieking in dismay.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear, my very best dress! It's ruined!"

Emma snatched a napkin and began dabbing at the dress, her voice a rising crescendo. "You stupid boy, you clumsy fool, how many times have I told you to be careful?"

Malcolm stood there in stunned horror with hands outstretched. He hated having his mother call him such names in front of Mrs. Philbrick, who always made him feel so smart. Now she would never think so again. This time he couldn't control the tears. Uttering a loud howl of despair, he rushed from the room.

Mrs. Philbrick looked stricken. "Oh, my, I'm sorry I shouldn't have made such a fuss. But it startled me so. Poor boy."

Emma said nothing at first, her fingers twisting the napkin into a damp wad. Such bad luck this this should happen to the very person she most wanted Malcolm to impress. She resolved to give him a good tongue-lashing later.

"It is *I* who am sorry," she managed to say. "Let me pay for the cleaning bill."

Mrs. Philbrick shook her head. "No matter, the dress really didn't suit me. But, my dear, Malcolm does matter. There shouldn't have been such an emotional outburst over this trifle. I think, as I've mentioned several times before, it would be wise if Malcolm gets attention before the situation becomes worse."

Emma's expression froze. She got up and began collecting the dishes.

"Everyone has emotional upsets now and then that get out of control," she replied stiffly. "And Malcolm receives all the attention he needs from me. I do hope another time you visit will be more pleasant."

Mrs. Philbrick flushed at the obvious dismissal, but she patted Emma's arm on the way out. "Well, at least, think about it."

Emma didn't reply. She certainly wasn't going to think about Malcolm being subjected to foolish examinations as though he were some criminally insane person. There wouldn't be any more visits from Carrie Philbrick, either. She was getting tired of these ridiculous insinuations.

Malcolm was in his bedroom beside the window that looked out upon the yard. His gaze wandered to the slightly higher mound beneath the lilac bush. He knew what made the mound. All the smashed cups, glasses, the blue vase with the chip, so many other things he

had hidden there so his mother wouldn't know he had broken them.

At least, he didn't think she did, because their absence was never mentioned. Someday, when he got a job, he'd dig them up again to be fixed. Wouldn't that be a wonderful surprise for her? His face broke into a pleased smile at the thought.

"*I* don't see anything to smile about."

Malcolm jumped and swung around at the sound of his mother's voice. He cringed at the look on her face. She was *very* angry this time.

Emma strode over to him. "You humiliated me in front of that woman, and now stand here laughing about it. This is the last straw. You've broken my heart!" Her hand smashed against his face.

She drew back, immediately regretting the hasty action—an unheard-of action. Her nerves must be really bad. Never, in all of Malcolm's life, had she ever struck him. The look he gave her brought tears to her eyes.

He pressed a hand against his reddened cheek, unbelieving. "Mama, you *hit* me, Oh, why did you do that? You don't love me anymore."

He started to rush past her and Emma blocked his way, attempting to comfort him. The youth's massive frame caught her off-balance and sent her sprawling to the floor, her head hitting the dresser on the way down. She lay there in silence.

Malcolm bent over her, making little keening sounds in his throat, shaking his head from side to side. He prodded her gently but her eyes remained closed. She didn't move. His head swam as he rocked back and forth in grief.

"Mama, Mama, I didn't mean to break your heart, honest I didn't! Please don't be mad at me! I love you so much!"

His eyes, (on the level with the window,) caught the mound beneath the lilac bush.

"Yes, yes, he would put her there with all the other broken things. Then he'd go to Mrs. Philbrick's house and tell her about Mama's broken heart. She would understand. Maybe she would even lend him the money to get it fixed. Mrs. Philbrick was so nice. She never got mad when he did something wrong. She wouldn't this time either, he felt sure.

Malcolm wrapped Emma in a sheet for he knew she wouldn't want soil all over her clean dress. He lifted her gently in his brawny arms. Her eyes twitched but, again, they didn't open. He dug the hole quickly, although it was quite a large

one—the biggest he had ever dug out here. A few people glanced in but no one stopped. Malcolm was always digging in the yard like some kid. He patted down the final covering of dirt firmly and smiled, feeling good once more, thinking how Mrs. Philbrick would praise his clever idea.

He went into the house and washed his hands at the kitchen sink. Mama wouldn't like him to have dirty hands. Now he would go over to Mrs. Philbrick's house and tell her what had happened. It made him feel important to go alone, because his mother liked to be with him when he went out. "To keep you company," she would say. It was about time he did something by himself.

He was halfway out the door when he spotted the two leftover chocolate cupcakes on the kitchen table. His favorites. He might as well finish them up. All that digging had made him hungry. Malcolm got a pitcher of milk from the refrigerator, and a glass. He sat down at the table and began to eat with slow, careful bites, so the cupcakes would last longer. Mama wouldn't mind waiting.

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THE STREAK

Protesting baseball's hottest property was a pipe—until the bombs and bullets began to fly

by MICHAEL CASSUTT

IT WAS NOISY even on the third deck of the stadium. The fifth inning stretch was over and with Rodriquez and the Conquistadores coming to bat, the crowd was getting vocal. They wanted a hit. But Nelson couldn't pay attention to the game right now. He was looking for someone.

He leaned forward against the railing between the rest rooms and a souvenir stand. Goldwater Stadium—the "Pleasure Dome"—had three circular decks stacked one on top of the other. The lower two were general admission seating with the third reserved for the private boxes of Phoenix Businessmen.

On either of the two lower decks Nelson could have done his spying with relative ease, but up here he was effectively blinded by the walls of the private clubrooms. There was a man up here somewhere—that he knew—but where? And how would he see him?

Gingerly, he climbed up on the railing, bracing himself

against the brick wall of the restroom building. He had never been much for climbing and suddenly wished he wasn't wearing shoes with slick soles. But by standing on the top rail he could see over the top of the building. There, forty-five degrees in toward home plate: a man crouched on top of the press box—a man armed with a rifle.

And Tony Rodriquez was coming up to bat.

* * *

"Mr. Schultz will see you in a moment." Nelson smiled back at the secretary. He had been staring out the window at a brutally hot Arizona summer day, a bit amazed to find that he had moved up in the security business to a status in which he received phone calls from the general managers of major league baseball clubs. It was a nice improvement from crawling through warehouses looking for breaks in alarm system—not that he'd been doing much of that lately.

Ben Schulz was an ex-ballplayer, stocky but still trim, with a permanent sunburn and outfielder's squint. He shook hands. "Nice to see you, Davey. Make yourself comfortable."

Nelson eased himself into a chair. "I understand you've got some problems with Rodriquez."

"Problems—you wouldn't believe it!" Schultz said. "It's gotten completely out of hand. We tried not to be dramatic about it. Hell, just about everybody who's in the public eye has to put up with cranks of some sort. But when we catch some idiot trying to slip into the stadium with a thirty-eight, that's just too goddamn much. Lucky he was drunk and waving it around. We got to him before someone got hurt."

"Has this sort of thing been happening a lot?"

Schultz leaned back, shaking his head. "No, it's been mostly letters, threatening phone calls, like that. But realize, Davey—until the last week or so, nobody thought he would ever get this close to DiMaggio's record. *I* don't want to take any chances. More important, the club doesn't." The club meant the Weaver family, none of whom was noted for either tolerance or patience.

"So you want me to protect Rodriquez," Nelson said. He was more than willing to play along with old Ben's games. Ben and Nelson's father were sort-of old buddies, and Nelson believed that old buddies should be humored. Financially, it usually was worth the trouble.

"Basically." Schultz paused.

"There's a catch?" Nelson asked.

"Not a catch, Davey. Realize, we're a new franchise, and the best thing we ever did was pick up Tony. He's kept the stadium full for us, even before he got off on this streak. It's put us in the black long before we expected. He's a prime investment and we've got to protect him.

"But, he's young and he's stubborn and he's—"

"Chicano," Nelson said.

Schultz looked pained. "It's just that he wouldn't like the idea of us looking out *for* him, understand?"

Nelson wondered if Schultz's fears about Tony's *machismo* came from Rodriquez himself or from watching made-for-TV movies about "street kids." He decided not to ask. "So we keep this from Rodriquez?"

"As much as possible."

That made it a whole new ball game. Nelson's past experience with "protection" (that is, keeping undesirables away from someone) was going to be almost useless in this situation. "It'll get out eventually, if we do a good job."

Schultz shrugged. "Will you do it?"

"Of course," Nelson said. The money was right. "I like a challenge."

It didn't seem quite fair to Nelson that Tony Rodriquexz should have people trying to kill him. Baseball and death don't mix, except for a poor guy named Chapman who got hit in the head by a Carl Mays submarine ball and died, back in the '20s. The heroes die, yes, after their best days are behind them. But blood spattering the gold Conquistadore uniform? Bullets zinging across the infield? No, no, it offended him.

He never been a real baseball fan, but from his father he had inherited a talent for the game. His dad had played minor league ball in the late '40s in the Midwest, a profession that brought him little in the way of fame, but lots of memories and an acquaintance with Ben Schultz. Until he was fourteen., Nelson thought from time to time that he might enjoy playing baseball—if he had, he would have wanted to be like Tony Rodriquez.

At 24 Rodriquez was a five-year veteran, still young enough to be in his physical prime, but with the experience to put it to use. He'd come out of the L.A. *barrio* to ride bench two years for the A's, then got picked up by Phoenix in the expansion draft.

He rapidly became the golden boy of the Conquistadores, the man the crowds came out to see, not only in the Pleasure

Dome, but around the rest of the league. He was goodlooking, he was easy with reporters and he hit lots of tape-measure home runs—none of which made him a likely target for bullets.

The streak did that.

Thirty-some years back, Joe DiMaggio hit safely in 56 straight games. It doesn't sound spectacular compared to 60 home runs in a single year or four no-hitters, but there was nothing like it when DiMaggio was hitting, the summer before Pearl Harbor, and the Rodriquez streak, in a summer minus impreachments and wars, was The Event.

It grew from day to day, as Tony hit in his fortieth game, then his forty-first, and it suddenly began to look as if he might break the last real record of baseball's good old days. But with every game added to the Streak, he collected another threat on his life.

Nelson and his team joined the Conquistadores in Minneapolis, the first stop on a two-week road trip. He and his three partners stayed at the Thunderbird Motel, between the Twin Cities airport and the stadium. Nelson wasn't expecting any trouble there. The Minnesota Twins had been having a poor season and the crowds that *did* turn out were the well-behaved, hardcore fans.

But he would be ready, just in case. The Weavers had let the Twins' management in on the secret, so Nelson had the unhesitating, uninformed assistance of the crew at Metropolitan Stadium.

The basic coverage consisted of a constant watch on Rodriquez everywhere outside the ballpark. The philosophy was simple—don't let anyone near him who hasn't got a good reason for getting near him. It was a bit difficult to do that without Tony's help—he seemed to have an entourage of high school buddies and young women—and Nelson was thankful about the unliklihood of anyone trying to hit him away from the stadium.

At the stadium—well, that was another sort of headache. The most Nelson could do, without drawing attention to the security, was add a few rent-a-cops to the crew at the gates. At least, Nelson hoped, they might be able to spot someone trying to smuggle an anti-tank gun into the park.

It was hot and muggy the entire four days, and an evening rainout necessitated a doubleheader the following night. After six straight hours spent wandering through the bowels of Metropolitan Stadium, Nel-

son was ready to get out of the celebrity protection racket and back to warehouses and small businesses.

Rodriquez gave no sign that he knew he was being protected. He seemed to be totally involved in the games, spending his time either at the motel or out at the park, practicing endlessly. And he hit in all four games.

Nelson, caught up in the merry-go-round of airports, motels and baseball games, developed a sense of respect for professional athletes.

Boston looked like more of the same.

THE TRAVELLER WAS both shabbier and classier than the standard team motel. Nelson was fond of it simply because it had obviously been built long before World War II. There wasn't a plastic, disposable anything anywhere in it.

He said good night to Burke, who was staying in the room across the hall from Tony Rodriquez, and went up to his own room. He turned the key in the lock and noticed a man standing next to him. He was one of Tony's buddies, dark-haired, seemingly forever smiling. He wasn't smiling now.

"Is there something I can do for you?" Nelson asked.

Now the man smiled, which didn't put Nelson at all at ease. "Tony sent me," the man stage-whispered.

"I'm afraid I don't understand." Nelson could see two more of the "friends" down the hall, watching the proceedings.

"You were staying in room two-hundred eighteen at the Thunderbird in Minneapolis. You're not a reporter. We *know* them and they're laying off Tony pretty much. You've got three people with you right now and you've been following Tony since last Wednesday. I'm a curious guy—tell me who you are." He was still smiling.

Nelson leaned against the door. He suspected the other man was carrying a gun. The hell with secrecy, he decided. "I'm here protecting Tony Rodriquez."

The man laughed out loud. "I'll be damned. The Weavers strike again. I'm protecting Tony, too."

Half an hour later there was a meeting in the room adjoining Tony's. Nelson, who hadn't been overwhelmingly convinced by the man in the hall (whose name was Gonzalez—"Gonzo" for short), was only sure when he saw Gonzalez chatting with a bleary-eyed Rodriquez in the hall.

"Tony Rodriquez," Gonzalez said, "this is super-sleuth Dave Nelson, of the Phoenix Con-

quistadores. Mr. Nelson, I'd like you to meet Joe DiMaggio."

"Nice to meet you at last, Joe," Nelson said.

"So they finally talked Ben into it, huh?" Rodriquez said. He was angry. "Goddamn! I *told* them six times—no guards. I told them I could take care of myself. What's their problem, anyway? They don't want people to come out to ball games without getting frisked? Jesus!"

He softened, slapped Nelson on the back. "I'm not blaming you, Nelson—you've got a job to do—but, *man*!" He looked at Gonzalez. "Gonzo, you take care of this. If I'm gonna get forty-seven tomorrow, I need sleep tonight." He went into his room.

"Coffee?" Gonzalez asked.

"HEY, IT WASN'T till his parent's house got trashed that Tony even *worried* about this stuff. But he didn't want the club to have anything to do with it, if there was going to be protection. He can't stand the Weavers, and he doesn't like the way Benjy Schultz plays nigger for them. So he got ahold of me.

"We were good friends in high school"—Gonze grinned—"and I wasn't doing much of anything. Working in a gas station. He offered to pay expenses for me and a couple of other guys to see that no one gave him any crap."

Nelson took a sip of the coffee. "How long have you been with him then?"

"A couple of weeks longer than you. We spotted you guys right off, hanging around. I mean, *you* were taking up the positions *we* should have—better in fact. We sort of thought you might be working for the club. So we waited before putting you on the spot." He smiled again. "Might as well spend a little of the club's bucks, right?"

Nelson wished for a cigaret. The café air-conditioning was turned up too high for comfort, too. "I'd like to keep on spending the Club's money, if you don't mind. I can't see myself going back to Schultz and telling him Tony's got his friends, so he doesn't need me. Huh-uh."

"It's okay with us, man. I'm not asking you to head back to Phoenix. It's a free country. I've got a job to do, *you* got a job to do. So—let's both do them, eh?"

"I think we understand each other perfectly."

* * *

"Christ!" Nelson almost fell off the railing. He climbed down and took out his walkie-talkie, squawked it open. "Hey

Gonzo," he said, "he's up there all right. Section C, on top of the press box."

"You're closest, gringo."

"Yeah." Nelson swallowed, feeling unhappy. This was turning into something out of a TV cop show. "Get me some help then, okay?"

"*Go*, stupid!"

He shoved the radio in his pocket and began sprinting toward the press box, wondering if this was going to become a real shootout. He'd always hated television for just that reason.

* * *

With two teams watching Tony Rodriquez and without the necessity of keeping the surveillance a secret from him, Nelson found his job much easier. He and his team did half the work they had been planning to do and so had time to take in the sights of Boston. Gonzalez's people did the same.

Rodriquez got hits in games 47, 48, and 49, defying the top pitching staff in the league. There was an article in the *Herald-American* during the series that hinted Rodriquez was getting little-league pitches to hit, that even opposing players wanted to keep the streak alive.

The article drew a vicious response from the Red Sox pitcher Tony had tagged for a double off the big Fenway Park wall the night before. "I get paid to pitch and win games—letting Rodriquez hit me doesn't help me win."

The last stop on the road trip was to be Baltimore and Nelson thought he might use it to see Washington as well.

Then, as Dad Nelson might have said, the roof fell in. The airport security guards at Logan International found a suspicious package when they X-rayed the luggage being loaded aboard the Conquistadores' plane. The package turned out to be a crude homemade bomb that would

have exploded in the luggage compartment while the plane was somewhere over New Jersey.

NBC announced that it was responding to public pressure (and willingly taking money from eager sponsors) to cover the streak and would carry all Phoenix Conquistadore games until the streak ended.

The Club called Nelson, the night he was leaving Boston with news from the New York City police about a serious plot to kill Tony Rodriquez. Nelson cancelled his vacation plans, and he and Gonzalez flew to New York while the Conquistadores (and the security teams) went on to Baltimore.

Schultz was staying at a motel near Kennedy Airport. Nelson and Gonzalez took a cab, and Gonzalez headed for the motel bar to wait while Nelson talked with the general manager.

"Hey, Davey, nice to see you again," Schultz said as Nelson entered the room. Schultz looked a bit more worn than he had in Phoenix two weeks earlier. Also Nelson noticed, he wasn't alone in the room.

"This is Detective Stephens. He's the man with the information." Schultz sat down in the corner. "You're been doing a good job, Davey. So far we haven't had a complaint. Not a word in the papers. The family's happy. But *this* stuff—" He looked over at Stephens, a chunky, no nonsense type.

"It's like this, Nelson. We got a tip last week. If you watch TV much, you *know* we've got lots of people running around New York just itching to tell us things." He smiled bitterly and Nelson wondered just how much work was involved in digging up the information.

"A guy in a certain bar was bragging it up to a certain person that he had the word to do it to Rodriquez. It wasn't any of this 'I'm gonna kill a spic' crap, this was more like business. Like, 'I've got my money, honey, and I leave tomorrow.'

"This guy, see is your average 'alleged underworld figure.' A soldier, I think they called him in *The Godfather*. We could nail him for about a hundred things, if we wanted to spend the next ten years working at it, but this looks to be as good way as any to get him."

He swallowed, then smiled crookedly. "He left for Baltimore a couple of day ago. We've got a name, which won't be much help."

"You see the problem, Davey," Schultz said.

Nelson sat very still. This wasn't fun any more.

GONZALEZ WAS WAITING in the

bar, drinking a tequila sunrise and reading the latest *Times*.

"Has the rest of the world gone to hell, too?" Nelson asked.

"That bad, huh?"

Nelson told him, added, "I'm starting to wonder just what I've gotten myself into."

Gonzalez folded the paper and showed him the front page. "Don't worry, man, you've got logs of *amigos* now."

Right there on the front page was a headline—

STREAK HITTER THREATENED, PROTECTED BY GUARDS.

The story was complete with details on the bomb in Boston and all the earlier threats, and with Nelson's name to boot. He sighed, thinking it's all out now.

"You know, this is starting to smell funny," Gonzalez said.

"Do wild bears live in the woods?"

"I'm serious, man. This isn't straight. Where'd this goddamned story *come* from, anyway. Neither of *us* knows all that stuff, I'll bet, and besides, we specifically asked writers to clear crack-pot stories with us. So here it is on the front page.

"You don't suppose the network or somebody told them it was okay, we don't care if we encourage nuts any more, we've got TV money now?"

"Maybe they did break it," Nelson said. "Maybe they don't want another Oswald thing."

"Maybe they do," Gonzalez snapped. "Of course," he added, lapsing into a horribly phoney Puerto Rican accent, "don't ask me, man, I'm just a ghet-to dweller, man. Par-a-noid."

Nelson was thirsty for something alcoholic. "How's the sunrise?"

"Terrible. Must be Polish tequila."

"I'll have a couple then." He began rubbing his forehead, wondering just how much more Tony would be worth to some people if he got killed.

The resulting publicity storm and television coverage made Baltimore's Municipal Stadium into a fortress. Years of practice in airport security had given guards experience in handling large groups of people quickly. There was a lot of griping, but no guns were found.

Rodriquez hit in games 50, 51, and 52, and people looked to Phoenix, to the star's return to the Pleasure Dome.

* * *

This would be the perfect end to the perfect adventure, Nelson thought. In less than a week he had arrived back in

Phoenix to become a "security co-ordinator," responsible for a corps of fifty uniformed and plainclothed guards.

He had spent hours in conference and on the telephone with the police, who were looking for an Easterner who might or might not have been somewhere in Phoenix, who might or might not have using his real name, who might or might not have been planning to kill Tony Rodriquez this afternoon, in front of sixty thousand people (and God knew how many more in the TV audience).

They hadn't found him, nobody really thought they would, until now. And here he was, Nelson thought, sprinting like a madman around the third deck, because there was a killer up on top of the press box.

He dodged through the upper-level crowds, causing a few angry remarks as he pushed people aside. He had been hoping that he wouldn't have to be part of the final confrontation—why couldn't they have nailed him at the gates? It reminded him too much of movies and TV, only he didn't have a script. How was the gunman supposed to know that the good guys won?

Slipping, he rounded the corner of the press box and burst up the stairs. "How the hell do you get up on the roof here?"

There were a dozen reporters in that part of the box. One older man said, "I think there's only about a five foot clearance—"

Nelson swore and glanced down at the field. Rodriquez was standing outside the batter's box, his hat resting under his arm, rubbing dirt on his hands. He was facing the stands.

Well, Nelson thought, *do* something. He opened the door again, got out on the steps and jumped for the roof. His fingers caught and he hung there. "Give me a push!" he panted, and the older reporter shoved him toward the top.

He wasn't even thinking about being quiet and he didn't know what to expect. There wasn't any room and it was darker than he thought it would be, having seen it from so far away. The man on his chest sighting with the rifle was turning toward him.

"Hey!" Nelson shouted. Where was Gonzo? The gun went off. Nelson was surprised that nothing hurt, decided the man had missed. Then he got sickly tired and fell backward off the roof.

THE ROOM WAS dark. He couldn't seem to move. Some-

thing was waving at him, and there was a voice. "This is one tough gringo." Now there was some light. Gonzalez looked down at him, and a doctor stood by. Nelson grunted.

"You've suffered a gunshot wound and a mildly nasty fall, Mr. Nelson," the doctor said. "You've got some broken ribs and a bump on your head, and a hole in your shoulder."

"At least he didn't ask, 'Where am I?' " Gonzalez said.

"How about, 'What happened?' " Nelson asked, surprised that he could talk and think, too.

Gonzalez looked at the doctor. "Is it okay to shock him?"

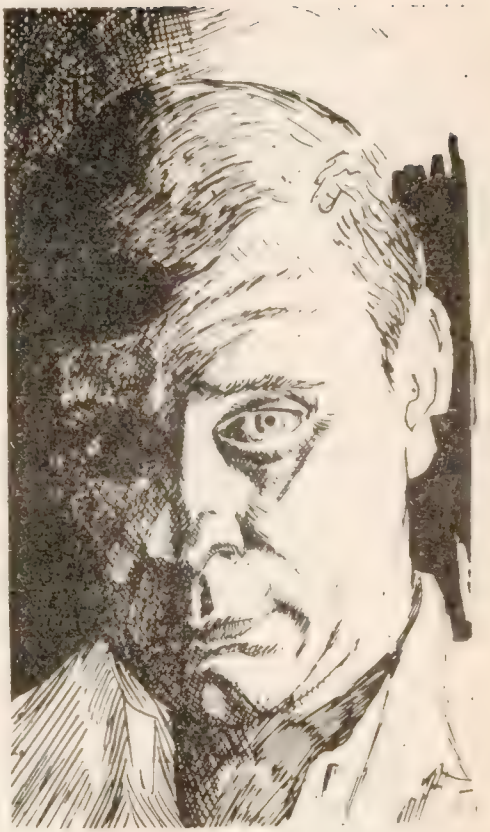
The doctor shrugged. "He wasn't shot in the head and the sedation's wearing off. Call me if he faints."

When he was gone Gonzalez pulled up a chair and sat down next to the bed. Nelson tried to sit up, then thought better of it. "Did we get him?"

"Yeah. Right after you distracted him. You fell pretty much back onto a couple of my guys, and a reporter. The guy up there really didn't have much of a chance. Yeah, we *got* him."

There was silence. "And?" Nelson asked.

Gonzalez grinned bitterly. "Well, I don't think we're going to keep him, you know?"



"I'm ignorant."

"Dude got arraigned and they set this outrageous bail. And he had it made within an hour. I don't think he's even on the same planet right now. I think they let him get away."

"*They*?"

"Oh, anybody. The network, the club, WASP America, I don't know. I'm just paranoid, you know. But I've been suspicious since all our cover got blown—all *your* cover got blown—man, *we're still* not recognized. It was so convenient.

"Do you have any idea of the audience those games reached, just because half the population of the world thought Tony was going to get shot in prime time? I'd like to see who got what money out of that. Or who's *getting* it. Man, game tickets are going for big loot right now, with one casualty already. Who knows what kind of nut will be out there tomorrow?"

"You think someone set this up?"

"Yeah,. Or more likely, someone just set the wheels going, you know. One hand over here sets up this defense, the other hand sets up an offense, and *whee—fireworks*! Any publicity is good publicity, right? Who gets hurt? Some dumb gringo. You've got some wonderful friends around here, David my son. Covering both ends of a bet. I wish *I*—"

"Shut up, okay," Nelson said. "I almost believe you."

"So do I. Just wait." Gonzo stood up. "Hey I gotta go. I'm still in the security business." At the door he turned briefly. "Oh, by the way, Tony says thanks." There was a voice from the hall. Someone else entered the room.

"Thanks, Gonzo, but I could do this myself." Rodriquez was at the foot of the bed. "I'm sorry this happened, Nelson. I don't understand exactly what's going on, but I'm going to find out. For you, too."

Nelson was mildly embarrassed, He had been clumsy. "Did you hit?"

Rodriquez didn't smile. "Yeah, number 54."

"Two more to go."

"Yeah, two more."

They left then, and Nelson put himself to sleep with mind games about conspiracies. He thought it was all pretty funny.

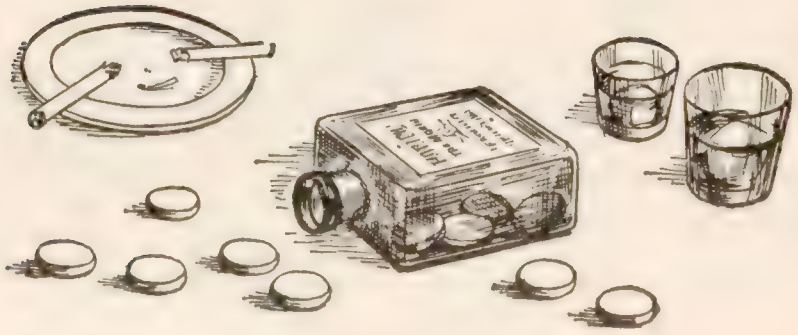
Ben Schultz called later and said that they were all very sorry, everyone from Mr. Weaver, Senior, on down, about what happened, and that they hoped David was being well taken care of, and not to worry about expenses, because the club was footing it.

All they would like was a favor, for them, they didn't want charges pressed because of all the bad publicity. "The sooner it's all forgotten, Davey, the better, for you and Tony and baseball."

Nelson hung up.

The next game Tony Rodriquez failed to get a hit. He went to the plate four times and never moved the bat from his shoulder.

Thirteen Cents For The First Ounce



The logical suspect was safely in jail when Gloria Forest was murdered. So how in hell did he do it?

by MARY L. TESTA

March 5, 1976

Dear Debbie and Joe,

I hope this letter finds you all well. Your mother misses the kids and curses the Navy for taking you all so far from her.

There was a bit of excitement here last week. You remember Dr. Forest—he replaced old McGillis—well, he got himself into a mess of trouble. Guess he'd had enough of his wife's philandering. He went down to the Olde Towne Bar and Grill, ordered a drink, and shot Fred Palmer right through the leg!

One of the guys called me down there (just my luck, I'd just gotten into a hot bath) and there sits Doc, smoking, calm as could be. The ambulance had already taken Fred away. The Doc says, "Fred was messing around with my Gloria" just like he'd say, "Take two aspirin and call me tomorrow." Fred's going to be okay, but the Doc is in bad. They took him over to

Alder for psychiatric evalution.

Well, that all the news—quite a lot for this place! Our love to all. Write soon.

Love,
Dad

* * *

May 16, 1976

Dear Debbie and Joe,

Your recent letter found us both in good health. We loved the Easter pictures of the kids. Your mother has shown them to the whole town, including weekend tourists!

News again—Gloria Forest is dead. We've ruled out suicide. She was getting ready to pick up her latest boyfriend from the airport and collapsed almost immediately after taking cyanide. We've checked out all the food that had signs of being recently eaten and we still don't know how she happen to get hold of that poison.

We are presently checking out her friends. Luckly for us, she didn't have many. A real "one man at a time" girl, except for her husband! And you should have heard her when the Doc was taken into custody—how sorry she was, that she'd never cheat on him again!

My bowling average is up another point. Hope to enter state Tourney in August. Our love to all. Write soon.

Love,
Dad

* * *

May 30, 1976

Dear Debbie and Joe,

By the time you get this letter, the kids will hopefully be over the chicken pox. Better they get it now, than later when school really counts. Mom is fine, except that she's worried about the kids.

You certainly seem to be taking an interest in the Forest case. Between you and me, my re-election may hinge on solving this thing. Jack Kelley is after my job and I've got to prove myself to keep it.

All our leads so far seem worthless. Gloria's newest boyfriend is a salesman for Circle K plant. He was away on business all week before the murder and didn't arrive back until after it was all over. He's been able to corroborate his movements the whole time.

Gloria's last boyfriend was Fred Palmer. After he got out of the hospital he went off and bought a service station in Camden. He's clear, too. I think he was ready to break it off with her anyway.

The boyfriend before him lasted a whole year, and he was

Denver Bruce, who died of old age in November. (Gloria wasn't too choosy.) Before that it was Joey Turner, who entered the ministry. Everyone is clear.

This whole thing has really got me down. Whoever did it had to have easy access to Gloria's food and drink, or however she got that poison.

Well, baby girl, that all I have to go on. My career is on the line, and it's not doing my bowling any good, either.

Love,
Dad

P.S. In answer to your question: Dr. Forest will serve maybe two years.

Also, no one came in or out of the Forest place since 3:30 PM at the latest. That's when Mrs. "Nosey" Jones went on "duty". Gloria was found dead around 7:00 that evening.

* * *

May 30, 1976

Dearest Debbie and Joe,

Darling daughter, you are my sunshine! I always knew you were a genius. Your mental acumen has assured Mom's and my future, at least until the next election. Your startling theory, sure proved true.

Love,
Dad

* * *

June 8, 1976

Dear Daddy,

I'm so very glad too be of help. But I must confess, it was not remarkable intellect that led me to solve your problem.

I visited Dr. Forest only once, for my premarital physical, a few days before the wedding. We discussed sex and birth control—don't blush, it was a very typical Doctor-patient conversation.

So when you mentioned Dr. Forest, I naturally geared my thoughts to my one meeting with him.

The birth control pills he prescribed for me had a simple foil backing, through which the user pushes a tablet each day. It would be so easy to remove the backing, replace a pill with a tablet of cyanide, and replace the foil. Being in jail is a great alibi. Remember, he didn't even try to kill Fred, he shot at fairly close range and hit Fred's leg. Two years is better than what he'd get for murder.

If Gloria had been sincere in her promise to remain faithful to Dr. Forest, she wouldn't have needed the pills. In a sense, Gloria did commit suicide.

Love,
Debbie

TO STALK A SPECTRE

The nameless driver heads for the Big Apple through a thick night fog. Highway patrolmen are closing in on him as he brings his cargo of narcotics ever closer to the big-league payoff.

by ROBERT E. TEPPERMAN

I SLOWED THE Pontiac down to fifty as I hit the blanket of fog and started looking hard for some neon signs and a cup of coffee. The tail lights of the truck I'd been following for the past hour or so faded completely in the thickening haze, though I knew he couldn't be more than a couple of hundred yards ahead, and the last thirty-six straight hours of driving were beginning to take their toll.

Geographically, the whole trip had been one big misrepresentation—from the Ocean Highway, that never passed water from the time you left Florida, all the way up to and including always glorious Delaware—The Diamond State, with its peach blossom symbol (where the only diamonds are imported from Tiffany or Cartier), and the peach blossoms, if truly existent, were normally invisible in a shroudlike blanket of fog.

About the only good thing I could say about the whole thing was that in another hour I'd hit the Chesapeake Bay Bridge and then, given a little luck and three hours on the turnpike, I'd be home free in New York.

By now the side of the road was completely obliterated and visibility had dropped to no more than ten feet, so I eased off to a creeping twenty. I forced my eyes to stay open

with thoughts of the delightful, invigorating cup of tasteless, odorless, overcooked bilgewater to come, and marveled at how coffee shops and diners always seemed to be on the wrong side of the road.

It had been a long trip from Nogales and I was glad it was almost over. Maybe for good. You could take just so much of this stuff, then you had to pack it in and call it a day or loose your mind and possibly even your life.

A rosy glow, a hundred feet or so ahead, brought me back to the present and I eased up on the accelerator, cutting the wheel sharply for the side of

the road. I bumped roughly across a drainage ditch, a couple of feet of lawn, hit the brake sharply, as a brick wall loomed suddenly before me. I finally came to rest, shaken but still in one piece, about a foot and a half from the entrance to a small roadside haven.

It was complete with simulated brick walls, flystained windows and a flicking neon sign that proclaimed it to be MOMMA'S REST. It was hard to tell whether she meant "rest" literally or if it was just that the AURANT bulbs had burned out. Regardless, I steeled myself for the ordeal to come and headed for the promised refreshment.

Inside it was elegant—a pockmarked counter showing the effects of many a carelessly handled cigaret, a handful of tables covered with dirty clothes scarred from many a losing encounter with bottles of ketchup and mustard, a blaring juke box and a litter of empty beer cans, remnants of some erstwhile celebrants who had already departed.

I plopped myself down on a stool. Momma waddled up and we exchanged fifteen cents for half a cup and half a saucer of a brew billed as coffee—while I lit up and tried to ease some of the tightness and tension in my arms and legs.

I sipped the coffee slowly, studying the face mirrored behind the counter—black hair needing a trim badly, strong cheeks and jaw needing a shave and a broken nose about which nothing much could be done. I was wondering just what in hell it had done to be forced to drink slop in a place like this, when the door swung open and two uniformed troopers walked in.

They looked around mechanically, dismissing me with a cursory glance, then grabbed two stools at the front end of the counter. Momma must have known them well, for without waiting for a word she set two orders of coffee in front of them, spread her tattered, sweatered elbows on the counter and gave them a wide, broken-toothed smile.

"Youboysmustbeworkin'late," she cackled. "Don'toffengettoseeyouthistimeofnite."

The older and taller of the two nodded. "Whole barracks is—everyone's on patrol tonight."

She cocked her head and leaned forward like an old fire escape crone, eager for gossip. "Sompinbig?"

Shorty, the tall one's sidekick, glanced down at me, decided from the slump of my back and my bloodshot eyes that I was just a stray trying to

sober up before facing the wife, then shook his head.

"Naw, just another one of those wild goose chases. They got a tip that some hood's due through here, trying to ferry a load of horse from Mexico to New York. Even got a make on his car—a late model, green, four door Dodge. But it's like looking for a needle in a haystack in this fog."

The tall one nodded in agreement. "Hell, you'd have to rub fenders with him before you could see the color and make of the car."

I didn't bother to wait for any more—enough was enough. I drowned the remains of my cigaret in the brimming saucer, unhunched my six-foot frame, got my still aching legs under me, checked to make sure that they could support a hundred and ninety pounds of dead weight and headed directly for the door.

I broke out of the fog a few minutes from the bridge, made the crossing and kicked her up to sixty on the turnpike, holding steady just a couple of miles under the speed limit. Another four, maybe five hours and, if I made it alive and in one piece, I'd be all done—this time for good.

It was the end of assignment blues—I always got them. Heading into the climactic unknown, death hovering beside you, driving at a steady pace cold sober on a darkened parkway, was no antidote. All you could do was think and thinking only served to heighten the misery.

From futility to depression to just plain morbidness—that's the way it always went. Review your life and what did you have? Six years in the Marines, four years of rough and tumble, barroom and back alley college, a year of post-grad work in Trenton—five years of earn-while-you-learn experience and a life expectancy of maybe forty. Even alligator wrestlers, jet fighter pilots and stunt men had a better deal. Hell, I suddenly realized, I'd never tried but I probably couldn't even get a thousand-dollar insurance policy.

I swung out mechanically to pass a slow moving truck with a shipment of Florida oranges and I slipped smoothly back into lane, shook my head to clear it of the depressing thoughts that swelled and swelled until it seemed they would burst out, and sped rapidly past mileage marker after mileage marker. One forty-two, one thirty–seven, one thirty-two—I rolled past them like the days, numbered indicators of passing time, no other significance.

What had I managed to amass? Clothes enough to fill a small suitcase, a car I couldn't even keep, a couple of thousand dollars, the stuff in my pockets, that was about it. While others collected little white houses, picket fences, wives, children and all the material things the world rated as important.

I spotted a Service Area sign and felt the temptation to swing in—to stop awhile amidst the lights, to exchange a few words with the waitress, to hear some human voices, maybe a little laughter. But thought of the time I'd lose and the knowledge that the waitress would probably be sullen at having to work a Friday night and that the customers would probably be dreary and depressed deterred me.

I checked the rear-view mirror, sneered back at the face that greeted me and then, out of the darkness that enveloped the roadway, I spotted a fast approaching pair of lights doing eighty, maybe ninety. I checked the speedometer, held her where she was, a shade under sixty, and concentrated on driving.

Suddenly I was awake, alert, driving with one eye glued to the mirror and the other to the road ahead. Brighter, clearer now—not more than a couple of hundred yards behind. I steadied the car with one hand and, with the other, unbottoned my jacket, shifting the holstered gun around so that it would be easier to get at.

A hundred yards now, fifty, and I could see the amber beacon atop of the sedan, silent and motionless in the night. Twenty-five yards and then the uniformed figures were clearly visible, for a second, as they swung out to pass, leaving me in a shock of wind and a spit of dirt.

What made a man do it? Lead a solitary life where every sound was unfriendly and every face could prove dangerous? Others saw the world at the very worst as black and white. From here there was only black—nothing to remind you of decency and hope; let alone kindle the spark of love or sympathy. You had to be a peculiar kind of person, a lone wolf some called it.

SLOWLY, OUT OF the night before me, a large shadow appeared beside the road, gradually taking shape as I neared it. Two cars—one, the police car that had passed me earlier and, stopped behind it, a late-model green Dodge sedan, just like the one I had managed to get rid of almost twenty-four hours earlier back in Georgia. Through the rear mirror, as I

passed, I caught sight of two men standing under the watchful gaze of one of the state policemen while the other examined their identification.

A tip they had said—so drive slowly, carefully; don't think about it now. Things always cropped up, foulups at the last minute that left you waiting, guessing. Blank it from your mind. Forget it—wait and play it by ear when the time comes.

Past Asbury Park, New Brunswick, not much further now. Exit signs were closer together, lights spattered the countryside, more frequent signs of life and civilization. Maybe it was like in the war; you were scared so you went out and proved yourself time and time again.

Maybe that was it. You plodded across Korea with the pain in your gut and the gun in your hand and made it. Then, after it was over, you had the decorations to prove your manhood but the living memory of fear was still there.

The road was quiet now, unlit and uninhabited, as I wrenched myself out of the mire of thought and switched on the radio. Soft music to soothe the savage beast but all I could get was the discordant jumble of some modern pop. A roll of drums punctuated by a sharp plop, a thudding thump. The car jolted, swayed, pulled to the right and I knew that today was not my day.

I pulled off the turnpike, slipped out and walked around to the rear, irritation building higher and higher as I looked at the shapeless rubber now resting beneath the rim of the wheel, flattened on the ground. I opened the trunk, glanced once helplessly at the spare, pulled out the jack and started to crank her up. The way my luck was running, I was surprised that the jack worked.

I got her up a couple of inches off the ground and was removing the last nut when I heard the hum of a motor in the distance and saw the steadily increasing glare of headlights. I got the wheel off and stood back, waiting for the approaching car hoping to hitch a ride. It wasn't more than a minute when she saw my car by the side of the road and stopped before I could even wave her down. Just what I needed—a state policeman.

He stepped out of the cruiser, shoved his hat back on his head and glanced around.

"Trouble?"

I nodded. "Tire's shot, got to get it to a gas station."

He looked inquiringly in the trunk compartment. "What about the spare?"

"Flat, too." I shrugged

calmly, trying to conceal the tightness inside. "How far is the next service area?"

"Quite a ways."

He walked over, glanced in the trunk and reached out to feel the spare. I watched him closely, shifting the wheel I'd been holding to my left hand and carefully moved closer to the tire iron, still lying beside the car where I'd dropped it when he pulled up.

It was taking too long. He was still in there gently squeezing the soft, deflated rubber and I reached down to get a firm grip on the piece of solid metal in my right hand, as he finally straightened up, glanced incuriously at the bar and shook his head.

"You guys never learn. Travel on a road like this, any place for that matter, without a spare. They should give tickets for stupidity." He turned, waving causually, "Stow that gear and I'll run you up to the service area."

I released the breath I'd been holding, allowing a slight grin of relief to creep onto my face. "That's okay, I'll hoof it."

He started around the car but stopped to call back over his shoulder. "Get in. It's close to ten miles. I'd rather drive you there than find you on the road from exhaustion or a hit and run. I'd just have to lug you in anyway and make out about sixteen reports."

I shrugged and started for the police car as he continued his circuit of mine. Suddenly he stopped, opened the front door and looked in as though searching for something. I stiffened, waiting. Ten feet, too far to jump him.

He came out holding something in his left hand, his right resting on the butt of his holstered revolver and I could see the stiffness in his back and the tightness on his face. I started for my gun as he drew closer, a questioning, almost angry expression on his face. I had it halfway out as he neared the car, reached forward and tossed something at me.

"Better take these with you. Leave keys in a car anyplace and it may not be there when you get back. Don't you do anything right?"

I smiled slowly, reached down and slipped the keys in my pocket. "Sorry officer, guess I was thinking of other things."

He nodded. "You sure must have been. But next time try to use some common driving sense."

WE GOT TO THE rest area in about ten minutes, I thanked him, watching as he pulled away, unloaded the tire on the station attendant and headed

for the washroom and a cup of coffe. Here, at least, it tasted like coffee and the waitress was blond, a pert five-four, surprisingly talkative and extremely friendly. Ten minutes, fifteen, and I finally managed to tear myself away, primed with the knowledge that she went off at twelve, in two short hours, that no one was waiting for her and that she'd be delirious with joy if, by some chance, someone was around to take her for a drink on the way home.

I left feeling better in spite of myself. Just talking to a woman who wasn't part of everything, who led an uncomplicated and normal life, perked me up as I made my way to the bank of pay phones in the lobby of the restaurant.

The first call took a couple of minutes. When a voice finally answered it was curt, not too friendly and wanted to know "where in hell" I was. I exchanged my knowledge of what time I'd arrive for his knowledge of the place. I committed the hotel address and room number to memory, slipped some more money in the one-armed bandit and dialed the operator again.

The second call, also to New York, went through much faster, as if someone had been sitting by the phone, waiting for it to ring and the voice answering this time was warmer and more encouraging. I checked my watch again, told him what time I could be expected in the city and hung up with his assurance that he'd not be a second late. That did it, so, with a parting regret for the poor waitress who'd have to make her way home alone to an empty house, I traded the station attendant five bucks for a lift back to my car and was in action once more.

I could see the lights of New York looming to my right as I swung off the turnpike onto the Pulaski Skyway and started the last leg of the trip to the Holland Tunnel.

Downtown New York was dark and deserted when I emerged a few minutes later and turned slowly up Eighth Avenue to keep my rendezvous. Suddenly I felt relatively calm and untroubled, save for the rigid knot in my stomach and the tension spreading through my muscles. It always happened this way, with the imminence of action.

I caught the light at the corner of Fourteenth Street, noting that the clock above the door of the bank showed eleven-forty-five. Twenty-five minutes ahead of schedule and one thing I couldn't afford, under any circumstances, was to be early. The Twenties were

empty except for a few Bowery citizens who had wandered somewhat afield.

The Thirties were quiet now—the only signs of life a few late travellers rushing to catch trains at Penn Station and occasional flashes of laughter from early-to-bedders leaving the cocktail lounges in the area. But the Forties were alive with swarms of people pushing and jostling their way down the streets, the human flotsam and jetsam mixing freely with the tuxedoed and ermined swells departing the theaters for a drink or a bite to eat.

Here, in this little foreign island, bounded by a seemingly respectable and staid city, life throbbed and reverberated. The highest mixed with the lowest. Twenty-five dollar magnums of champagne ran into fifty-cent jugs of wine. The raw animal impulses of man were put on overt display and all could find the satisfaction that they craved.

I slipped into a parking space near Ninth, on Forty-sixth, and sat quietly in the car for a minute. Still fifteen minutes to kill. So I lit a cigarette and looked around. A neon sign near the corner beckoned invitingly and, without waiting for second thoughts, I turned off the lights, remembered to take the keys this time and headed up the block. One drink couldn't hurt and it was a far better prospect than sitting in the darkened car for a quarter of an hour.

It was a typical West Side clip joint—three barmaids in films of lace that covered less than five percent of their bodies, a long dimly lit bar and a small, dark back area with a few tables, a bunch of men and a few girls. I straddled a stool, got a shot of bourbon on the rocks and a flash of bosom for a buck-fifty and glanced around.

It was a motley crowd, all of them trying to look as if they were having a good time—trying to get high on three-quarter-ounce shots of fifty-percent-diluted bar whiskey while the hunger, loneliness and even dispair showed clearly in their eyes. I nursed the flavored water for close to ten minutes. Then, having had enough, I abandoned my seat to another lonely jungle prowler and headed back to the car.

By the time I got back I was right on schedule, so without wasting any more time I opened the trunk compartment, slipped out a pocket knife and slit open the airless spare tire that had almost caused me so much trouble. It took a minute and then I had it—an oblong package wrapped in plain brown paper and neatly tied

with rough, heavy cord. Class A, uncut heroin—enough to supply hundreds of junkies for months, enouch to support peddlars, wholesalers and suppliers for weeks, enough to cause or result in untold numbers of hold-ups, muggings and rapes. A real nice business.

I shunted away the unpleasant thoughts, slammed the trunk closed, quickly dusted off any places I might have left fingerprints, put the package under my trenchcoat and started up Ninth towards forty-eighth to write an end to the whole thing.

The hotel was in the middle of the block, dingy, dull and inconspicuous—the kind of operation that rented its rooms on a weekly, daily or hourly basis as long as the payment was in advance—the ideal place for a drop. Inside, a tired grey haired old man dozed lightly behind what passed for a registration desk.

Rather than wake him, I slipped quietly past into the elevator and gently closed the door. I glanced at the buttons, wondering what waited upstairs. Then, without further hesitation, I rang for the fourth floor, pausing only to transfer the gun to my coat pocket.

The corridor was still, lit only by one flyspecked fifty-watt bulb straining out the last of its life in a gallant attempt to save mankind from darkness. The walls were dirty, chipped and peeling while the four different patterns of tile on the floor showed where it had been patched, repatched and mismatched over many years. I made my way down to 436, a corner room in the front, knocked once, then twice more, and turned the unlocked knob.

THEY WERE THERE and waiting. Three men grouped around a rickety card table, bare save for a bottle of whiskey, three glasses and a deck of dog-eared cards. One was stocky, dark and greasy, with a pinstriped suit, a yellow shirt and a black tie. The other two showed their trade if you knew where to look for it but conformed less to the stereotype.

The Big Guy was pushing fifty, greying and deeply tanned, wearing a two-hundred-fifty-dollar suit, but with the hard, expressionless eyes and tight, thin lips of a predatory animal. The third resembled an advertising account executive—bronzed, fit and good looking—but carried the muscle for the organization. He was the tough boy who kept the peddlers in line, sat on the junkies when necessary and handled any beefs that might arise.

I kicked the door shut,

flipped the package on the table and shook my head at Greasy.

"You're nuts to play cards with these guys; they're compulsive, even cheat themselves at solitaire."

Greasy's mouth opened, then shut as the boss waved him down. "You talk too much. He don't understand words like compulsive anyway." He turned the package over slowly in his hands then ripped a piece of the wrapping in the corner and looked at the transparent plastic bag inside. "Looks okay."

He put the package in his pocket, shifted around and looked up coldly. "Besides, you're late. What the hell kept you?"

I smiled, ignoring the ice in his eyes and shrugged. "Even us messenger boys got to play once in a while. There was this cute little Mexican chick down in Nogales and I'm seducible. You haven't got anything against sex, have you?"

Muscle laughed but the Big Guy never even blinked, just continued to stare straight through me. Finally he leaned forward, pointing a finger for emphasis. "The difference between a live jester and a dead fool is that the first knows when to keep his mouth shut. Maybe you better remember that." He shoved the table aside and started to rise. "We been here too long already. Time we got out."

I sobered quickly with the sudden thought that I still had at least three more minutes to kill. "You got my money?"

He nodded, reached inside his jacket pocket, flipped a thick white envelope at me and motioned to the others to get ready to go. I hefted it wordlessly.

"You don't mind if we count it before breaking up do you?"

Muscle started to snarl but the boss shook his head. "Let funny boy enjoy himself—the way he's going, he may not be around long enough to spend it." Muscle shrugged, turned and ambled over to the window as I began to leaf through the tens and twenties in the envelope. I'd hit five hundred and still had a ways to go when I heard a sharp intake of breath and he spun from the window, pointing wildly.

"Christ, the street's swarming with cars. Fuzz all over the place."

The Big Guy turned white under this tan, for a second, then pulled himself together. "Let's get out of here fast." He paused, glanced quizzically at me and waved in a kind of casual gesture. "I think bright boy here just retired from the business."

Muscle grinned, starting for-

ward, one hand sliding inside his coat. "The pleasure's all mine." The grin disappeared as quickly as it had come and I could see the glint of sadistic pleasure in his eye, at the thought of the job to be done. I fired twice through my pocket, catching him hard in the chest and slamming him to the ground.

Greasy may have been stupid but he wasn't slow. I swiveled quickly, bringing the automatic up, just in time to catch on my shoulder the sap that had been directed at my head and felt the numbing sting of the heavy blow clear to my fingertips. I slipped to the side as he stumbled forward with the momentum of his swing, caught sight of the Big Guy desperately trying to drag a bulky revolver from a shoulder holster. I locked my toe around the back of Greasy's knee and, as he hurtled past me, brought the barrel of my piece down against the back of his head.

The Big Guy's gun was out now, swinging slowly into line as I hit the floor, rolled clear of the table and tangle of bodies, came to one knee and barked, *"Drop it!"*

I could see hate, anger and bewilderment fighting for ascendancy in his eyes. I could see the snub-nosed ends of the bullets in the chamber of the forty-five and then I could see the big, black hole zeroing in on me. He wasn't used to doing his own killing any more but he wasn't going to quit that easily.

I could see his finger whiten from the pressure and the cylinder start to move as I squeezed off a quick shot without aiming. He stumbled back, a look of shocked surprise on his face, I could hear the splat of lead hitting wood on the floor beside me. He wavered, righted himself with an effort and leveled the revolver again. No time or chance to aim for an arm or leg; I fired twice more quickly, heard the revolver drop from nerveless fingers, came to my feet and watched as the big body swayed, then toppled slowly to the floor.

It was all over in a minute, maybe even less. I took one last look around the apartment, thoughts jumbling wildly through my head. Blonde waitresses, picket fences and the overriding fact that someone had put out a tip on the shipment. The bad guys were dead and couldn't talk but there was no reason why they ever should have. I forced the thoughts down deep where they could fester awhile, shoved the automatic back in my waistband and ducked out the door, down the hallway and into the fire

exit as the heavy pounding of feet on the landing announced the arrival of New York's finest.

The first two through the door were detectives, guns drawn—naked in their hands. Behind them came the troops and finally two men, both dressed in civilian clothes, one with a lieutenant's badge pinned to his coat, the other wearing the shield of a deputy Inspector. The lieutenant stood silent at the sight that greeted them, then shook his head.

"I guess we were a couple of minutes late. What about the . . . " His voice trailed off as he watched the inspector move from body to body to check the faces. "What about the undercover man?"

The inspector straightened. "The son of a bitch made it again. Got clean away. Makes the uniformed troops look a little silly sometimes but . . ." He shrugged and motioned to one of the detectives. "Impound the H, post uniformed men in the halls and don't let anyone near this room till the photographers arrive."

He turned back to the lieutenant. "Too bad the undercover man can't be around for the applause but once that happened he'd be useless." He looked speculatively around at the other officers in the room. "Hell, he'd probably be dead."

The lieutenant shook his head. "I've never understood what kind of men they are."

"They're a different breed." The inspector shrugged. "They have to be to take the job in the first place, to live alone and unsung. And the longer they go on the more different they become—paranoid even. Friendless, unable to trust anyone, not even to trust a brother officer. It's a thankless job but at lest he's got the satisfaction of knowing that he personally prevented all that heroin from reaching the market place." He paused and concluded, more to himself than to the other, "I only hope to God the knowledge still helps."

I made it across a couple of roofs, down an adjoining building and back into the street. The knot was gone now, together with the icy feeling. All that was left was the memory—the relentless memory. Not even the thick white envelope wedged under my waistband could obliterate it.

Till the next time. Yeah, there'd be a next time. Money, blondes, picket fences, tipoffs, it didn't matter. There'd be a next time and a next time—I'd go on stalking the spectre till one day in some alley, bar or hotel room I was finally summoned to answer roll call in the greatest muster of them all.

THE HIJACKERS

Three trucks ripped off in three weeks–six men murdered. Jake hadn't a single clue–or had he?

by LORRAINE MARISE

AS JAKE ENTERED, the diner, he whipped off his visored patrolman's cap and walked to an empty seat at the crowded counter. He watch the girl behind it, balance two dirty plates on her forearm while carrying another plate in one hand and three half-full water glasses in the other. He heard a handful of silver clink on the counter four seats away, as three young men in Levis stood up to leave.

The girl stacked the dirty dishes in a large green bin, allready bulging with gravy-smeared plates. She grabbed a sponge and turned back to the counter.

"Hi, Jake. Be right with you," she said as she spotted the husky policeman.

"Take your time, Mary," he called. He watched casually she pushed a sponge quickly over the vacated area of counter. With her free hand, she lifted the coins from the counter and deposited them in her already jingling apron pocket. The young couple seated to Jake's right helped their twin boys down from the high stools and left the diner.

"Come back again," the pretty waitress called after them, as the screen door banged shut. At the same time, she placed a thick brown mug

of steaming coffee in front of Jake.

"What'll it be tonight, Jake? The usual?" She pulled pad and pencil from the change-free pocket of her apron.

"No sense changing my eating habits now."

Mary turned and, keeping her eyes riveted on the pad on which she wrote, ordered in a loud voice, "One BLT, lotsa mayo!"

Jake watch through the glassless window into the kitchen, as the middle-aged man in the tall white hat went swiftly into action.

Mary took two roast beef dinners from the ledge of the kitchen opening and placed them in front of the men seated on Jake's left. An elderly couple at the far end of the counter got up and walked toward the door.

"Good night," Mary smiled at them.

Only Jake and the two men next to him remained at the once-crowded counter.

"Brother!" The waitress sighed as she cleared away the elderly couple's plates. "It's sure been busy tonight,"

"How's the law-and-order business?" She asked, coming back to Jake, her duties done for the moment.

"Pretty slow tonight," he answered, lifting the heavy cup to his lips. He sipped the hot liquid and grimaced as it burned his tongue.

"Get anything on those hijackings yet?" Mary asked, turning to take Jake's plate from the ledge of the kitchen opening where the cook had just placed it. She placed the sandwich in front of the officer.

"Nothing yet," Jake answered. "Thank you, Mary. But we'll catch them." He bit into the sandwich hungrily.

The man seated to Jake's left heard this last exchange. "Did you have a hijacking around here lately?" he asked.

"Several," Mary answered.

"Three trucks hijacked in three weeks," Jake explained.

"Whew!" The man whistled. "Where'd they happen?"

"Different places along the highway," Jake replied, motioning with his thumb to the road behind him, which ran in front of the café. "One was seven miles north of here, another twelves miles south, the last one nine miles north."

"It could make a guy nervous hearing that," the man two seats from Jake chimed in.

"Anyone get hurt?" the first man asked.

"Hurt to death," Mary answered.

"Yeh," Jake said. "Each time, both truckers got their brains blown out."

The second man's face con-

torted in pain, as if he could feel the explosion inside his own head.

"Is that your rig out there?" Mary asked, nodding her head toward the large white van, which was partially visible through the front window of the diner.

Both men nodded in silence, as they ate their roast beef.

What are you hauling?" Mary asked.

"Refrigerators," the first man answered.

"Yeh," the second man said. "Wouldn't the hijackers just love to get hold of a truckload of them?"

The other three nodded and half-laughed at this remark. Then Mary said, "But *you're* going to catch them, aren't you, Jake?"

"That's right, Mary," the officer answered, a faraway look in his eyes.

"And just how are you going to do it?" Mary asked, daring the officer to come up with a perfect plan.

The first man watched Jake, anxious to hear the policeman's reply. The second man stared at the pretty waitress.

"Well, we've got two units, mine and another one, patrolling a strip fifteen miles north and fifteen miles south of here, all night."

"Hmmm," said Mary. "That just might keep the hijacker away." She turned to the two men. "Which way are you headed?"

"North," the first man shot back.

There was a short silence, as they finished cleaning their plates. Then Mary pushed herself away from the metal sink she had been leaning against.

"Excuse me, fellas. I've got to call my boyfriend," she said and walked across the room to the pay phone on the wall in the alcove leading to the restrooms.

"I think maybe we talked too much," the second man said aloud, as he watched Mary take a dime from her apron pocket and insert it in the phone slot.

"What are you talking about?" the first man asked his partner, quizically. Suddenly, his eyes flashed with knowledge, then with concern. "*Oh!*" he exclaimed, straining to look past Jake at the girl now whispering into the phone.

"Mary?" Jake asked the second man. "Nah! She doesn't have anything to do with the hijackings. She's a good kid. I've known her almost two years now." Jake sat in silent thought until his blonde friend returned the receiver to its hook. "No," he said aloud, "Not Mary."

Jake stood up to leave, and Mary returned to take his plate

from the counter. He threw two bills on top of his check.

"See you later, Mary," he said, slipping his wallet back into his pocket.

"Okay, Jake. Take care," she replied, already pushing her sponge busily over his section of the counter.

"Take it easy, fellas," he said to the two truckers still drinking their coffee.

"Yeh, thanks."

"You, too, Officer."

As the screen door banged shut, Jake couldn't help wondering if his waitress friend might not have something to do with the recent hijackings. She had brought the hijackings into the conversation. She had asked the truckers what their load was and which direction they were going. She had seemed mighty curious about what preventative measures the police were taking.

After hearing all the answers, *she* had made that phone call. To her boyfriend, she had said. That bothered Jake even more, as he recalled Mary telling him, just last week, that she was "between romances."

As he opened the door of his patrol car, Jake decided he would definitely run a check on his friend first thing in the morning.

Sitting behind the steering wheel, he picked up his radio microphone and got mobile unit 27 on the air.

"Come on in for dinner now, Mike, I'll cover both sides while you eat."

"Roger, Jake, Over and out," came the voice from the radio.

Jake replaced the microphone and picked up the walky-talky from the seat beside him.

He pushed the button down and spoke. "Trent?"

"Yo," the instrument crackled at him.

"White van, heading north in about five minutes. Refrigerators," Jake said. "Now remember, one bullet each, smack in the left temple, just like I described to you how the hijackers have been doing it."

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